Bounty of Earth

Donald Culross Peattie
Louise Redfield Peattie

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Bounty of Earth

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by

Donald Culross Peattie
and
Louise Redfield Peattie

Decorations by
Margaret Evans Price

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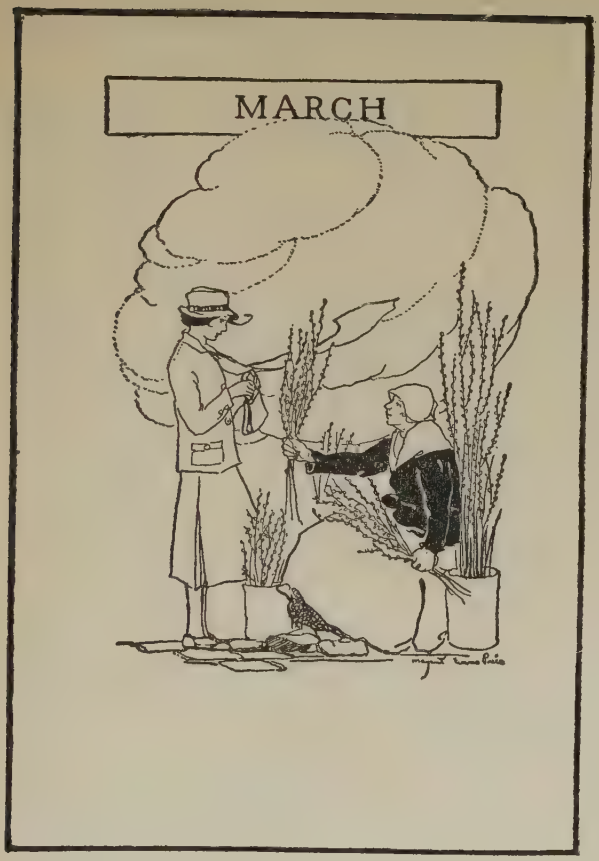
TO

ONE AT WHOSE HANDS SPRINGS MOST
LAVISHLY THE BOUNTY OF EARTH'S BEAUTY

BERTHA DREIER REDFIELD

Contents

	PAGE
March	1
April	43
May	61
June	77
July	95
August	119
September	141
October	155
November	173
December	193
January	213
February	225


MARCH

BOUNTY OF EARTH

March 1.

We had pulled our two chairs to the window, out of the stuffy breath of the dark flat behind us, to catch the little night breeze that came wandering up the narrow street from some happier place where the sky was wider.

Narcissa sniffed. "There's dampness and greenness in that," she said softly, "and a flavor of blue hills and budding tips of things."

I nodded in the dusk, and drew a thinly whistling breath upon my pipe, filling my lungs with the rank pungency of smoke; the sweetness of that faint odor in the wind had a pain of loveliness in it.

In the dark beside me Narcissa drew a long breath and let it out in a sigh.

"My feet ache," she said forlornly, "and I'm discouraged."

When Narcissa is discouraged the outlook

is bad—very bad. I stifled my alarm and got hold of her hand.

"I have trudged *miles* to-day," she said vehemently. "Miles of dingy flats, all alike —all smelling of cabbage and varnish, all with a magnificent view of a blank brick wall."

I fell into dismal absorption over the grisly prospect.

"The baby would wither and wilt," Narcissa said; "he'd grow up like celery, or anything that's blanched in the dark."

I patted the hand that trembled a little, and chewed my pipe. All that is inept and inarticulate I felt.

"I want a *home,*" Narcissa went on, with quiet passion. "With sky over it, and earth under it—good old black earth you can grub in. And things to look at—things for the baby to pick, or chase—water to fall into. A spring or a brook. I always wanted to live near a spring," she ended dreamily.

"On a hill," I suggested, "if I can't have a full-size mountain. There are usually springs in hilly places," I added reflectively.

The dark little wind came in and touched us secretly, and went away again.

"We'll have to take what we can manage to get, I suppose," Narcissa said with bitterness in her bravery.

I kissed her in the dark, but only hit a bit of soft black hair and an ear.

"Isn't it warm for early March?" I said with a ghastly cheerfulness. I am a blundering male, but Narcissa knew all I wanted to say.

March 2.

I

Everybody at the Museum has Spring fever to-day. My confrères whose desks are in the musty, oppressive corners of the library and the old herbarium have come out to work at tables nearer the open windows, like grizzlies emerging from hibernation. Wilted are the wing tips of the Director's collar, and the starch has gone from his dignity, too; his broad mahogany desk has the lucky place by the open window, looking toward the

park, and all morning his eyes have been roving Spring-ward, the keen blue of them gone gentle and tired, like thawed pools reflecting the warmer sky.

In the little cubicle adjoining, the girl who mounts the specimens has dropped her head sleepily on her arms upon the table, and in the stenographers' room there is a lagging, hesitating note in the usually brisk rhythm of the clacking typewriters.

With the goad of conscience pricking me, I spent the first two hours of the morning identifying a dried specimen from China, gathered months ago by some lucky fellow standing actually upon the ancient soil that gave the withered wisp to birth. Nothing of whatever beauty clung about that alien scene is preserved in these brittle leaves, and my spurious energy ran out in a pitiful trickle. A hand working without direction from my conscience reached up to the shelf above my desk and pulled down White's *Natural History of Selbourne.*

Tilting back in the creaky old chair (I applied for a new one two years ago, but Congress has not yet voted an appropriation

for it), I fell so deep in the fine handiwork of that kindly old ornithological cleric that the starlings quarreling outside my window were no more than the animation of those kin of theirs that Gilbert White described in the page I was reading.

Sleepy time droned past, while "official business" lay neglected on my desk, and I read on:

March 1. Speedwell (*Veronica hederifolia*) flowers.

March 2. Frog (*Rana temporaria*) appears.

March 3. Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) crows.

March 4. Land tortoise comes forth.

March 5. Goose (*Anas anser*) sits on its eggs.

March 6. Dog's violet (*Viola canina*) flowers.

March 7. Trout begin to rise.

March 8. Peacock butterfly (*Papilio io*) appears.

March 9. Crow (*Corvus corone*) builds.

March 10. Oats (*Avena sativa*) sown.

The nostalgia of an old early English Spring swept over me, intolerable with far-away sweetness, and outside my window the March wind of here and now whistled around the corner of the old Museum like one boy calling to another to be up and out. Suddenly it romped in through the open window, seized my specimens light as straw, my pamphlets, and my hundred pages of careful manuscript, and tossed them about the room in glee and derision. Then, pouncing on an ancient yellowed book, the pride of the Librarian's incunabula collection, it whipped the frail leaves over, and went laughing out of the window again, as though to say, "There! I've read that stupid old tome, and what was there in it?"

I made patient order of the havoc. But as I sat sorting the closely written pages of my monograph, I fell to wondering if perhaps they did not merit somewhat the treatment they had had—the scorn of a right-minded March wind, of any liberated spirit. Is Narcissa right?

What is the good of mulling over other men's works, correcting their minor errors?

These dun wisps of flowers once living may have grown around the tomb of Lao-tse, but what of it now? They are deader than Lao, by a great deal. The collector who touched them, while they were living, fragrant, filmy corollas—he at least touched life. My fingers and my lens explore but the mummies of things once beautiful, flowers that might better have been left to make mold for the next season's glory.

Some day my monograph will be done. I can picture it, in fine type, bound in sober gray, with the title: *New or Little-known Compositæ of the Brereton Expedition to Hupeh.* The Director will hold it five years waiting funds to publish it, and then my dry little study will go to all the libraries and be catalogued and put on the shelves, whence nobody will ever take it down. Is it, indeed, worth resisting the March wind for only this?

The long, hollow note of the noon whistles blowing—and on the stroke of twelve, by the office clock, the telephone on my desk shrilling impudently!

Out of the dusty, jangle-filled air that

hangs in a blue haze over the city, Narcissa's voice, bright and cool, comes freshly to my ear.

"Yes, me of course," I answered. "Are you down town for lunch? I'll steal a bit of extra time and we'll go to that Swiss place with the forty-nine kinds of sausage."

"Not a bit of it!" the happy bell of her voice came ringing. "I've got two ham sandwiches and a glorious hope! You're to come double-quick to the trolley station—we can just catch a car to where we're going."

"Where's that?"

There was a fragment of a laugh in my ear.

"Hurry up, and you'll see."

The thread of her voice clicked into blankness.

II

And this was what Narcissa had to tell me, her gay face tilted to me, as we sat in the yellow straw seat of the rattling trolley.

"Well, you know, I had just seventy-two cents left out of the week's budget to get

dinner with. And the day was so Spring-some I thought I'd just go into the market by way of the flower stalls out behind. And the very first thing I saw was a great mass of darling pussy willows all meowing at me to come and buy them. There was a little old woman vendor sitting in the midst of them—she looked like a quince that hasn't got picked but has stuck to the bush all winter, getting hardier and more wrinkled every minute. So I got some of the pusssy willows—I *had* to, darling, we can have crackers and milk for supper—and I asked where she picked them. She was country all over, so you could see the pussies were country, too.

"And this is what she said, in a dried-up, smiling voice:

" 'I picked them down by the little Run, over in Marcy Hundred.'

"Somehow it sounded like a line out of some little old poem nobody remembers. And I said:

" 'Marcy Hundred—where's that?'

" 'Over the river and up in the hills,' she said—and that was like another bit of a poem!

" 'It's thereabouts I live,' she said. And all of a sudden I said:

" 'I want to live there, too! Is there any place I could?'

"She didn't seem to think it a bit odd of me. She just wrinkled up her face more than ever and after a minute she said:

" 'Well, it's been many a year since folks were living in the lodge at the Old Briary Place.'

"That finished me! I just asked how to get there, and wrote it down as fast as I could. Wait a minute—" Narcissa scrambled in her bag and produced a bit of paper which she read aloud:

"Get off trolley at Chinquapin. Cross meadow down into woods. An old leaning oak—turn there. Down ravine to a spring under a big tree—look up and you'll see the house!"

She lifted a triumphant face to me.

"But good heavens, Narcissa! How do you know whether—"

"Oh, I found the agent," she said, dismissing the matter as unimportant. "He says we can have it, for half the flat rent, if we want

it, though he didn't see why we did. But of course there are some people who don't know poetry when they hear it."

The trolley rumbled over the bridge across the broad river, and Narcissa and I leaned from the open window to scan the waterway winding down into the hills. The wind in scudding gusts leaped up into the sky again, leaving a sheet of blue reflecting a clear heaven. Gulls flashed in shining parabolas across the glitter of water, and down the river, just discernible, a flock of ducks, little bobbing dots, rode the wavelets.

"I wish that were Marcy Hundred," Narcissa wistfully said, her eyes on the high rolling banks, heavy with great naked woods, that locked the river in its upward reaches. I could see the shadows in the faces of jagged rock, and at the tantalizing bend of the river the pebbly shore shone like a curving blade.

And while we looked, all we saw had vanished, and the car was rolling casually up among gentle hills, through a straggling village where here a dog lay in the street, magnificently indolent, and there a woman raked

at brown grass behind an old box hedge. Through high, silent woods (hangers, old Gilbert White would have called them), we trundled, whence now and then a flight of crows swept black and ragged, through meadows where the pushing shoots of onion grass made green the stubble and where hardy little cedars stood black against the sun. We fell to wondering what sort of a wild-goose chase we were on, while the little yellow sheds of the stations were jerkily reached and passed.

Once more the conductor jangled the cord of the bell in signal, and yelled through the car:

"Chinquapin!"

III

The trolley creaked its way out of sight and we stood alone on a brown muddy meadow, with no sound about us but the faint whistling of larks from the grass, and the gentle gossip of the pines in the wind. Somewhere behind us the faint call of traffic told where a highway lay, but our course led

downward over the sloping meadow, down a bit of gravelly road between the broken lines of cedars where little birds hopped busily.

"How washed it all is," said Narcissa, lifting a serene face to the sky. "Isn't everything beautiful to-day?"

The dun grass turning green, the sky swept clean of clouds, and the chinking laughter of the meadow-larks—everything was new and thrilling. Even a piece of white paper, rolling and gleaming as it sailed before the wind down the road ahead of us, was loveliness. We joined hands and ran after it, laughing.

"There—what's that?" asked Narcissa, pulling up breathlessly. "A chestnut or an oak?"

"An oak. And it leans!"

So we left the gravelly lane for an old, leaf-strewn cart track through woods still silvered with Winter's storms. It led us gently down and the hills folded us in. Here in the little ravine a wintry chill and quiet lingered still. A cardinal was whistling his urgent call somewhere unseen ahead of us.

We followed quietly, until an old tulip tree beside our path let down a great, exquisitely bending bough, as though in benison. Here from the lichened rocks among its roots a spring ran out, a little, mirthful, secret bubbling.

Narcissa caught my arm.

"Look!" she whispered, pointing up the hill.

On a sloping ledge half way up, under great oaks, a little house stood, retreating, it seemed, into the hillside itself. Its gray stones, faintly greeny now with mold or lichen, gave it a sleepy look and its weathered shingle roof, with two small dormers in it, slanted down compactly.

"It's like an acorn!" Narcissa cried, "lying under the big old oaks like that!"

"The roof looks as though it leaked," I said.

"The door seems to be staring at us," Narcissa whispered, disregarding me.

"Well, I suppose now we're here we might as well look the old place over," I said.

It is my part to be skeptical, but I never

get such practical results as Narcissa with her optimism.

We took the little slanting path up to the house. It stood regardless of our coming, wrapped in some reminiscence of its own. The windows were boarded; the leaves had blown in drifts against the walls.

"I'll make it come alive again," Narcissa said below her breath.

Before the green-stained, faded door, we paused, seeing together how a tiny shallow pool of water lay in the block of stone before the door, in the faint hollow worn by the feet that had passed in and out over that threshold.

"Can you open it?—it doesn't look like much of a lock," Narcissa said.

We were whispering still, as though some fragile spell hung over us. She proffered a hairpin, and I picked at the rusty lock until it came open.

"I never broke into a house before," I objected ruefully, pausing.

"Never mind," she said practically; "it's your own house you're breaking into."

I thought of dubious plumbing, but I said

nothing, for by the dear mad magic in these woods I knew it was my house.

IV

When we had investigated the one biggish room and the infinitesimal kitchen downstairs, and the two tiny rooms upstairs under the slanting eaves, and had remarked all their inconveniences and waved those away, we stood before the bare and dusty hearth, in the light and warmth of the shaft of sunshine through the open door.

"But there's one thing that's certain, my dear," I said soberly. "I could never get back and forth to the office every day from this far-away nook in the woods."

"No," agreed Narcissa unhappily. "I suppose you couldn't."

I took a big breath.

"And so," I said cheerfully, "I see I must give up the office."

Narcissa caught my hand, and stared into my face, her own alight.

I patted the hand, as though one chucked

one's job, on a capital of two cents and a bent nickel, every day in the week.

"I've been looking desperately for an excuse to do it," I said. "And I can swing it—I know I can."

Narcissa shone back at me. "Of course," she said lightly.

Her faith, when I brazenly say, "I can," is appalling!

Suddenly she broke into laughter.

"Old Thing!" she cried. "Let's get married again—together, to the little house—our Acorn house!"

She stood up straight, with her hand in mine, her face grown grave. The eager, early sunshine of the year streamed curiously in upon us, lighting our new abode.

Narcissa's voice was bright with laughter, yet it rang out with all her heart in it—

"We, two gay and foolish people, take thee, Acorn, to be our home, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, to love and tend and cherish, and to fill with happiness, and thereto we plight thee our troth!"

March 5.

We have moved. In such accents must Cæsar have reported, "The die is cast," and crossed the Rubicon. It has been a day of wayward warmth and shower, of halts, delays, and breathless rushes, of trunks and bales and nondescript boxes and overflowing hampers, of delirious adventures by the Young Runabout among the cart horse's hoofs, and of consequent hairbreadth escapes, of masterly campaigning by Narcissa, the generalissimo of the job, and on my part of lifting and shoving and sweating, and pleading at the top of my lungs with the deaf carter *not* to put the washtubs upstairs on the bed, or the kitchen stove in the living room.

Yet somehow Narcissa has already cajoled an effect of order out of chaos, and already our household gods seem to have settled comfortably into their niches in the Acorn, not ill-pleased with their new shrine. Here in the living room the big wing chair and the

low little rocker stand on the hearth looking toward the bright brass fender and the two little Hessian andirons marching interminably nowhere. My desk between the two big windows is already littered with papers for to-morrow's work; I write this page under the lamp on the table, and across from me Narcissa sits sewing on soft red stuff that is to be curtains, she tells me, for the row of little windows over the bookshelves. The lacquer cabinet gives shadowy brilliance to the darkest corner of the room, beside it the armchair, a squat figure with bow legs, its hands apparently pompously on its knees, which we have wickedly named after my uncle the bishop. All the pictures still stand with their faces to the wall like naughty children, save one—the *Santa Maria,* flying home with the wind of triumph bellying her sails, speaks a ringing word of adventure, from over the hearth where the flames of our first fire are rejoicing up the chimney and out into the cool still night.

For the night is still with a great quiet that seems to descend beneficently from the wide dark arch of space above the woods.

I hear only the scratching of my pen, the whisper of the burning apple-log, the faint rustle of Narcissa's gown where she bends over her sewing, and from the enveloping night only the faint endless soliloquy of the spring below the hill, and that sound, more still than silence, of the wind hushing through the trees.

March 6.

The Acorn has a little garden. I never suspected its existence under the deep drifts of leaves until I began to rake the two rough terraces behind the house. Here the blanched spire of an iris peeped out, and there the thorny fingers of a quince emerged. My rake broke a tender narcissus shoot, and after that I got down on my hands and knees and pulled the leaves away with careful fingers.

They say that Pompeii was excavated with hand trowels, lest pick and shovel break a marble Apollo or an iridescent tear vase. With no less reverence and suppressed ex-

citement I set to work uncovering the forgotten city of a once loved and tended garden.

There are crocus and snowdrop and tulip and daffodil, phlox and larkspur and pink, and a dozen more little shoots I cannot yet identify. How long have they been here, neglected, struggling up through ever deeper drifts of leaves? What man or woman planted them? What children pulled the heads off the stalks and were scolded for it? Who last looked on the garden, in the days when it was tended, and said it a farewell?

Patches of garden where no flowers are bespeak the annual beds. Did marigolds grow there in the old age of the year, pungent and bitter and gay? And how many tender flowers has Time destroyed? Just so the eras of geologic time have extirpated great tree ferns, cycads, and ancient grotesque whole families of vegetation. This old garden is a miniature of natural selection, a little cosmos whose creator is no more known to me than the Creator of the Universe.

The hardy shrubs and trees seem to have fared best—a few old apples and wild cher-

ries, a straggling mimosa, the hedges of box and Forsythia, and the fingers of ivy on the walls. But over the upper terrace the Japanese honeysuckle has run devouring riot, and the turf of the lower terrace is as long as a witch's hair.

The little crumbling wall of bricks that marks the edge of the upper terrace is so unsafe that I shall take it down and edge the slope with a railing. I shall come out on Spring dusks, while Narcissa walks up and down the lawn, her finger in the baby's hand, and paint it blue, and get blue spots on my old trousers and blue smudges over my eyes, and I shall smoke that rankest pipe that Narcissa doesn't allow in the house.

March 7.

But Narcissa says that a garden is a wilderness unless it blossoms with the rose, nor have I found one greening, thorny spray on the ragged terraces. Wisely Narcissa argued that if the quince woman sold pussy willows she might very likely sell yet other

things, even rose stock. So to-day we went to find her, taking the baby in the wheelbarrow.

The quince woman's house, we discovered, is the little brown one on the edge of the meadow bordered on its far side by the trolley tracks. We found her at her back door; she seemed more pleased than astonished to see that Narcissa had taken her at her word and brought us to Marcy Hundred, expressed willingness to serve in matters of laundering and scrubbing, and informed us that "her man" was in the sunny side garden, if we wanted "a bit green stuff."

We found him crouching in a border of pale narcissus spears against the wall—a gnarled codger with a squarish white beard and a cap tied up with strings.

Narcissa clutched my arm.

"Mr. MacGregor to the life!" she whispered. "We've stepped into *Peter Rabbit!*"

He heard our steps on the soft earth, and looked up.

"They're ah cooming up!" he said, by

way of greeting. "But this soil is bahd. It wants more humerous in it."

He prodded with a black and horny nail the adventitious buds greening the brambles of a rose against the wall, and spoke with pride mingled in his disapproval.

"See, she's puttin' oot adventurous buds. I'll have to be prunin' 'em off, the little devils."

We laughed not then, but when we had safely departed, having fished the young one out of a watering pot, and, after his subsequent escape, rescued him from the precarious top of a broken flowerpot where he yearned toward the rabbit skin—I hope not Peter's—nailed on the sunny wall above him.

Now the Spring day is looking toward the elfin green of its twilight. The rose stock is set out. The spade is thrust triumphantly in the broken earth—I see it from the window. Lingering yet in the garden, the Bud, the Adventurous Bud, is trying to induce angleworms to come up out of their burrows. He and they and the green tips of the rose stock are all answering to the Spring's muted horns.

March 8.

The Bud to-day had his first geography lesson. With him in my arms or pattering waywardly ahead of me down the trail, I made the survey of the wooded valley that follows Briary Run down to the river. He knows now the meaning of "hill," and "run," and "river," and I have learned in general the lay of the land in this part of Marcy Hundred—the two long wooded ridges holding the little valley in their arms, and the glen itself near whose head the Acorn stands. The Run takes its source from the spring under the big tulip tree, and joined by other rivulets, it grows in breadth and speed and laughter before, a mile away, it reaches the engulfing river.

Where lacing cornels and willow withes shelter its secret chuckling, we found a flock of pussy willows blowing bravely in the chill wind on their slim branches, and cut an armful to carry home with us.

Pussy willows belong in that endearing

class of things first admired in childhood and thereafter always loved. They are as full of sturdy cheer as the red-cheeked children who bring them in to school these days. As if to protect themselves from fickle March blasts, the catkins come dressed in a soft, warm wool, and on the top of this they wear at first a shiny brown overcoat.

Here, though no showy flower, is a wonder of minute floral structure. Each little floret of the many that compose the whole catkin is snuggled about with silky hairs. The first warm days will cause the pussies to expand, bursting out of the one big shiny scale and rapidly elongating. Then suddenly the stamens with their golden anthers will hang out of the fur, tempting the bees to come and carry the pollen to the female flowers which are always on wholly separate plants.

Narcissa put our pussy willows in water. We shall keep them while they bloom and die and drop, to show the Bud how the leaves unfold and how from the cut ends roots come pushing. Imagine a man, cut off at the waist, growing new legs!

March 9.

In the last minutes of the trip home from town, the walk up the path from the spring, my eagerness to see Narcissa and the Bud leaps almost out of bounds. Yet to-day, when I swung open the door with a halloo, the Acorn echoed emptily. The living room lay somnolent smelling of wood smoke and the violets that filled a howl on the table.

I went into the kitchen; an aura of fresh baking and newly ironed linen lingered, but there was no Narcissa looking up with a flushed face framed in damply curling hair. I went upstairs, into the two little dormer rooms under the roof, only to find them empty.

Yet I stood for a happy moment there on the threshold of our room, breathing the immaterial presence of Narcissa. The personal fragrance shaken from her gown as she passes, the exquisite faint odor of her hair, touched the air of that little chamber

into life. I went in softly, and crossed the room to the Bud's. And here, as though from some uncorked priceless philter, arose the very essence of that delicious place at the back of the Bud's neck, just below the cropped curly hair.

I stood staring out into the dappled golden green of the tree outside the nursery window, smiling foolishly, I suppose. And then suddenly the beauty-haunted rooms were lonely, wanting voices, warmth of hands and eyes. I turned in a sort of panic, and it seemed a very stroke of fairy beneficence to hear dear laughter from the open door below.

March 10.

To-night I should dip my pen in golden ink to record the first blooming in the old tangled garden. Before ever the wildlings of field or wood have braved the chilly winds of March, the old forsythia bush is breaking into flower, flinging a golden arc of bloom against the gray wall of the chimney.

If this sweet shrub has any ancient lore or story, the mists of time have swallowed it or the barriers of strange languages prevent us from learning of it. All that I know of the events it may have looked upon I guess from its name, for it commemorates the soul of a flower lover, dead now these one hundren and ten years, William Forsyth, sometime gardener of the Royal Gardens at Kensington in the days when the corpulent Prince of Wales came there to walk with the impeccable Beau Brummel.

March 11.

A golden day, with a lazy, hazy warmth reaching tentative fingers even into the valley bottom. In the middle of the morning Narcissa washed her hands of cooking and baking, and declared that, for all of her, the family would have to subsist on honey and locusts as long as the miraculous day spun out its shimmering thread.

So we tumbled bacon and bread and oranges and a bottle of the inevitable milk for the Bud into a basket, and the basket and the Bud himself into the wheelbarrow, and took the path along the stream to the copse where the flat rocks bask in the sun. Here was a hearth lying waiting, and by the brook grew alders, ready to supply a turnspit.

The alder cannot boast much usefulness. It grows sometimes to the stature of a tree, but it is never suitable for lumber, and though its wood is cut for making charcoal, it is little good as firewood for the hearth. This fault, however, is a virtue, too. For an alder stick that will not burn will never treacherously drop the camper's sizzling chop or bacon into the flames. And however little work the alder can do, standing idle by the rivulet swollen with thaw it did its part to-day in giving loveliness to three happy idlers the long afternoon through.

For the alder is in bloom now, hanging out its catkins from leafless branches. The long, gracefully pendent male catkins, as they are appearing these days, are a handsome russet.

Soon they will change to green and finally to greeny gold when the pollen-laden anthers hang free. The little female catkins do not droop, but stand erect, a ruddy brown. When ripened they will turn to tiny cones, so like miniature pine cones that it has made me sometimes wonder if alders could be evolutionary descendants from pines—by what forgotten and collateral relationship who can tell?

March 12.

Down by the Run, where it meanders among mucky meadows, there peeps a gnome-like hood. The skunk cabbage, poor, despised, ugly brother of the Spring flowers, is now in bloom, if the word may be allowed for such a lowly efflorescence. That elfish cowl that, by all the rules of flowerdom, ought to rise gracefully higher, never does, and then one day it is wholly gone, and rank leaves have taken its place.

Surely it is heartening to see that bronze and purple spathe push up its hood, in the

uncertain days of wayward warmth when not even the windflowers dare venture forth. As for its smell, it could be worse, and at any rate if you don't touch it, 'twill do you no harm.

Like all the members of the Arum family, its flowers are minute affairs crowded on a spadix or axis inside the spathe. On the same plan are built the Jack-in-the-pulpit and the stately calla lily. But a very humble member of the great tropical aroid family is the skunk cabbage. Still, I do not know that I should like the haughty tropic aroids much better; they are showier, but they are apt to smell much worse, and they bloom in a land of perpetual summer. Give me the skunk cabbage, hardy, cryptic, and earthily beautiful. I will hold a brief for it, however the courtroom laughs at me.

March 15.

A day of favorable auspices. The wintry glitter has gone out of the sunshine; the air

is mellowing; the capricious gods of editorial Olympus choose to favor me—and to-day I found the first hepatica.

Browsing through the woods on the upper ridge, I stopped short to see at my feet the delicate radiance of that fearless little flower. It rose alone upon its hairy stem, one of the earliest blossoms on the waking earth. Even its leaves come not so soon as this innocent adventurer.

Those leaves are leathery, and lobed in three. Their likeness to the three-lobed human liver struck some medic of olden days, and by the quaint logic of Doctrine of Signatures, leeches thereafter used the hepatica as a remedy for liver complaint!

There was more superstition than poetry in the eye that could see nothing but liver in this fairy-flowered plant. There is an elfin variability in the flowers, for though blue is the common shade they may be rose-purple, and again I have found them nearly white. As for the number of petals, or more exactly sepals, in the hepatica, there may be only six, but I have found seven, eight, or even up to twelve.

March 17.

The Acorn's garden is unlocking its box of surprises. Snowdrop and winter aconite, fritdelillaria and blue squills and grape hyacinth bloom here as happily, I believe, as ever in the hot, dry, time-wrinkled earth of the Mediterranean lands. But to-day was the birthday of one more lovely still—the yellow crocus that I found this morning holding up its first candied goblet to the sun. It appeared all unaware of its past and the tales told of it.

Once upon a time, before the cheaper coal-tar colors displaced the vegetable dyes, the saffron crocus yielded a well-nigh sacred color. Its use was born in the East, where it still persists. Then, legend has it, a pilgrim to the Holy Land brought saffron crocus bulbs back to Europe, concealed in his palmer's staff—for the jealous Saracen would have preserved the secret of his color. It is no legend, but a queer, tragic item in an old chronicle, that in the Middle Ages a

woman, a man, and a girl were burned at Nuremburg for adulterating their saffron dye.

In India, they say, saffron is still in use for coloring the ceremonial cakes, and I noted only yesterday in reading W. H. Hudson's *Afoot in England* that the naturalist fed a bit of saffron cake to a dog, who properly relished it, being a good Devonshire pup. This ought to have happened in the town of Saffron-Walden, but alas, did not.

But perhaps from that delectably titled village came the old recipe in rhyme:

'Pare saffron between the two S. Maries' daies
Or set or go shift it that knowest the waies.
What yeare shall I do it, more profit to yield?
The third in the garden, the fourth in the field.

To-day the yellow crocus in my garden is useless, innocent, and happy. And I choose to think it was of this flower that the Biblical poet sang:

For, lo, the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone;
The flowers appear on the earth,
The time of the singing of birds is come!

March 22.

Alder and willow and elm, sassafras, maple and poplar—they are all in bloom or soon will be. For the great host of our forests it is Spring, and the time for unfolding of flower and leaf is at hand. But for one tree it is not Spring, nor ever will be again. The chestnut, once forest king, is dead. Mutely its bleached skeleton pleads for our pity. No birds will ever nest again among its green leaves, nor squirrels forage upon its sweet nuts. Only the scavenger crow, with his love for dead, blasted trees, comes to sit on the chestnut and bask in the warming sunshine, his harsh wings as burnished as the sere trunk of his throne.

Scarce a living American chestnut exists in the Hundred. Such few as are still half alive are in the last stages of the dreadful

blight that has swept the country. More than twenty-five years ago the chestnut blight, accidentally introduced from Asia, got its start on Long Island, and, spreading unchecked, has slain all in its path. Not for lack of heroic efforts to save it has the chestnut died. But the disease, which spreads under the bark, is incurable, and is carried with inexorable certainty.

But as when an old man dies we look to his son, so may we look to the chinquapin, a dwarf chestnut common throughout our East and South, whose nuts if small are very sweet. Thoroughly blight-resistant, the chinquapin is the one consolation to me when, tramping the Spring-sweet hills, I come upon the stark skeletons of the chestnut.

March 28.

While the Bud napped and Mrs. Quince MacGregor polished up the Acorn, Narcissa and I quit walls and worry, and tramped in the blowy weather all the way down the Run to the river.

There on the high rocks, where the brook slips in a slim cascade down into the broad, smiling river, we looked down stream, to where, two miles or more away, the white arc of the bridge shone at us, and beyond it the rolling map of the city spread out on the low hills and flats. We could just discern a yellow trolley crawling over the bridge.

Standing in the wind, her skirts whipped back from her straight little figure, Narcissa laughed suddenly.

"It *was* Marcy Hundred—this," she rejoiced. "I might have known it would be. There's a special corps of angels deputed to grant all our wishes."

I crumpled three rejection slips in my pocket, and nodded with reckless happiness.

And after all it does seem niggardly to require much more of a Providence so lavish in bounty of earth. To-day the prize of our walk was anemones—those flowers "that ne'er ope their eyes until kissed by the wind," and, though they seem too delicate to survive a June breeze, somehow cling to their petals all through the windy month of March.

Symbol in ancient times of childhood, girlhood, and virginity, the dainty flowers lifted faces young as ever to show us why they signify such purity. Clear white, shell pink, or rose, and in their texture delicate as a baby's skin, they were the very spirit of these first days that are not really Spring, but tremble on its verge.

Now, too, in the Old World the country children are rejoicing in the sight of windflowers, from Germany to Italy, stopping to pick them as they burst to starry bloom even at the snow line. Some that have deep crimson or purple sepals symbolize for the peasants the passion of Our Lord, since they bloom till Easter time. The Pasque flower, of this gens, is far the most brilliant blossom of the Spring upon the prairies of the West. When I was a child we celebrated a Pasque flower day, and went in troops with baskets, roaming our Illinois steppes, to find the rarest and the fairest of our flowers.

APRIL

April 2.

This month belongs to the Amaryllis family. I went to-day to admire the Amaryllis show in the Government's greenhouse, but I must confess that to my taste those sultry, tropic efflorescences suffer by comparison with the sweet, hardy daffodils and narcissus starring the grassy slope outside my window. They stand poised, untroubled, lifting clear, pure faces, reminding one of ancient Greece and the sinless youth of the world.

Only to think that there are lands so happy that daffodils and narcissus there grow wild! Does narcissus grow beside streams and pools of Attica? Surely it must, to have given rise to the legend of Narcissus—a vain old tale, unworthy of these unselfconscious, unreflecting flowers. For in the world of plants nothing thinks. There are no human passions, no malice, no pity. The poison—the narcissine—in these bulbs will, if you eat them, slay you as surely as hemlock slew Soc-

rates; if you tend the flowers they will each year return to you innocent delight and the early, ancient morning that fills Theocritus' poems.

Easter.

Pokes and toques and sailors and tailors and picture hats there are new all over the world, but none for Narcissa. I have felt so badly about that that I have never even breathed the word hat. Nor has she.

This morning I went out early, before the Bud had crowed and while Narcissa's hair was still a dusky aureole on the pillow, down to the marsh where the young leaves overhead make a thin veil of radiant green and where prevails that peculiarly enchanting smell of woody, wet decay. Why do white violets choose the marshy places? Is it that, rare and shy, they seek retreat where only the galoshed foot dare tread?

I left my double handful before Narcissa's door, and went to fetch the morning milk. At breakfast Narcissa, in an old pink ging-

ham, with a wreath of white violets on her poised, dark head, handed the popovers, feather-light explosions, across the table.

Sweetly smiling, violet-breathing Sappho!

But could Sappho make popovers, I wonder?

April 5.

Through the thin sleep of dawn, I heard this morning the white-throat sparrow, and woke to listen, lying quiet and happy under that ever-returning spell. Sometimes he sings at night and above all on rainy days he wafts his silver song the whole day long, as reiterative as the raindrops.

Boldly these days the male chants to the coy little mistress whom he pursues in the thickets; sometimes brooding upon the bridal and nesting joys he whispers a soft fragment of his song, "as in revery of approaching happiness," says that prince of American naturalists, Nuttall.

In Canada they think he says, "Sweet Canada!" and in Boston he is thought to chant an old and honored name in "Peabody, Peabody!" But to me he seems most often to be crying, in his descending, wistful chromatic, "Oh! Long ago, long ago, long ago —Oh!" His song is a fragment of an unfinished symphony. To hear it raises in the memory other Springtides, long vanished, and old gardens—I hear the falling of forgotten fountains . . .

April 8.

Rambling home from a tramp in the hills I passed again a familiar negro cabin on a sloping meadow—a shiftless, sagging affair of weathered boards. But to-day the ramshackle hut was transfigured to a glory by the little redbud tree beside its door.

Sometimes the redbud is called "Judas Tree." This is an Old World name, applied to a related species of the Mediterranean basin, especially the Holy Land. Early

Christians believed that once the redbud's flowers were white; then after Judas had betrayed his Saviour, he hanged himself on a bough of one of the trees, and suddenly the flowers turned the color of the traitor's blood!

But redbud is not the color of blood; it is a dainty purple-red. And surely the graceful little tree, dancing down the hillside in the bright blossomy garment that alone covers its naked branches, holds more of the careless pagan spirit than of that darkest and most bitter death.

April 10.

Narcissa, who has just come in flushed from a tramp over the red-clay hills, is wearing at her belt a bunch of the first azaleas of the year. How prettily they become her, all pink and white and fragrant as they are! But though she does not need azaleas to make her lovely, were she ugly as a hag they might transform her. I knew once an old grizzled Belgian peasant, who

had migrated to the North Carolina mountains, who became almost beautiful as I saw him descending a hill with his arms full of flame azalea.

In fact, each of the azaleas—and America is their home—brings some bright recollection of a particular place or time when first I saw it. If pink azaleas mean the mountain picnic where first I met Narcissa, then flame azaleas, those tongues of orange and scarlet and yellow that leap in the dark forest yet cannot fire it, will ever stand for the coming of Spring in a mountain glen where a white nymph of a waterfall bathed in the pool at its feet. Rhodora, the little purple azalea, belongs to student days when first I learned the sparse economy of New England beauty in May. The swamp, white azalea, fragrant as honey, summons up a picture of toiling, mosquito bitten and sweltering, through a desolate swamp on Staten Island and reaching at last a bit of ground almost dry where in weariness I flung myself down and first saw those pure, aloof corollas.

April 15.

There is a wet smell of new grass coming in through the open window, and in the sunshiny dew of the naked garden the Bud is consorting with the Spring. I can see his abbreviated profile and yet briefer smock atilt where he watches a singing bird in a little, bare tree.

"Maids, maids, maids, put on your tea-kettle—ettle—ettle—ettle!" This accepted translation of the song-sparrow's lyric is patently right, for he is a domestic little fellow, a contented Benedick to the heart. A father as devoted as the mother-bird, he has raised, by my observation, as many as three broods a season in his tidy little nest of grasses lined with horse-hair. And year after year he is wont to return to be the presiding spirit of some chosen garden.

For he has laid his lines in familiar ways, and the adventure he chooses is the quiet life. It is for earnest young men pushing peram-

bulators down suburban sidewalks that he sings, and it comes to me, hearing that tranquil exultation, that he is voicing the song that swells unsung in many an inarticulate throat.

April 16.

Close against the sunny back wall of the Acorn a troop of tulips stand, trim and jaunty, on parade. Their accustomed background is a human habitation; they belong proudly to the race of plants which man found long ago in Asia, the cradle of humanity, and tended and took with him for his comfort and delight.

Intimately as we associate the tulip with the Dutch, it came to the Low Countries not earlier than 1600. The Austrian ambassador at Constantinople was the first to send tulip bulbs from the Orient to Europe. As the Persians, and after them the Turks, found the tulip in the wild, it had long, narrow petals with red and yellow as the only

colors. This sort the worthy Mohammedans preferred, and any aberrations from that standard in their garden plots they carefully destroyed. But the round-faced Dutchmen singled out the goblet-shaped flowers with ovate petals, and to-day that type is the cheapest and most abundant.

But in the great "Tulipomania" of 1630, when bulbs were more costly than the precious metals, and speculators dealt wildly in passing whims of tulip fashion, many strange new varieties were born. The taste, as in chrysanthemums to-day, ran to the bizarre, and white-grounded petals with eccentric splashes of gorgeous colors, mauve, lilac, rose, purple, and black, were all the rage. The modernistic "parrot" tulip, drooping and jagged, sold for a hundred dollars a bulb. Now there are tulips for every taste, doubles and bizarres for those who love the fantastic, Darwins for those who like pastel shades, and the plain old-fashioned cottage tulips for the simple-hearted who prefer strong, gay colors and familiar forms.

April 18.

When the Bud puts a strange object in his mouth, and his mother flies at him to excavate for pin or stone or succulent bit of twig, he nevertheless is working on a sound principle. I know a great entomologist who identifies ants by their various flavors of formic acid, and when a botanist is confronted by a leaf or twig that is vaguely familiar but not to be named off hand, he will incur, in the interests of science, whatever risks there are to tasting it. Nothing except a smell is so swift as a taste to evoke in the memory a moment, a scene, a name.

I wasted half an hour to-day, down in the little ravine, reflectively gnawing some twigs of spice bush and sassafras. In their medical guises of benzoin and sassafras tea, I cannot endure them. Nibbled under the greening canopy of the woods they are an experience, and I am sorry for the properly behaved folk who never chew twigs. Spice bush smells of anise and cloves, sassafras of oranges and

mucilage. Their flavors are a ranker distillation, yet dearer to me than frankincense or honey of the Cyprian thyme.

April 19.

For a week now the ferns have been unfurling in the damp, cool woods beside the Run, and only the stern call of a newspaper editor has delayed me in recording the event. Upon a fine, black, shining stem the maidenhair spreads out its dryad tresses. The cinnamon fern sends up richly brown stipes covered with the wool that humming birds gather for the lining of their indistinguishable nests. The leaves of sensitive fern, royal fern, and moonwort uncoil from a crozier like the staff a bishop carries. What were the fern-seed spells the witches knew? Is there no whisper of them under the frail green plumes expanding now, obedient to the ancient magic?

This is a dainty miracle, a fairy play upon the floor of the woods. But conceive it enacted in past ages when the earth's surface

was dominated by the giant tree ferns! To have gazed upward through the steamy air at a massive frond unfurling high overhead! Spring in the jolly old days of the dinosaurs must have been a fantastic, magnificent, and appalling spectacle.

April 24.

Of a warm Spring Sunday morning, while the slow, sweet bells were tolling godly people to devotion, and my fellow students still slept in their beds, I and a friend used to be up and out of the placid, comfortable town of Cambridge. We took our way, bottles and nets in hand, to the low, springy meadows that border on the looping Charles, and there we fished the creeks for what those sluggish algal waters might yield.

In happy recollection of those times I have been making an aquarium for the Bud, and as a necessary step he and I have been to the brook to capture some inhabitants for our zoo. The life in the brook and shallow ponds is awakening now. Silvery black, the

Dytiscus beetles dart, on the hunt for a nice juicy bite out of any snail so bold as to show his helpless flesh. Water striders zip across the jade water as though it were jade indeed, and even in mud puddles in the road we find floating great translucent clouds of pollywog eggs.

To keep the balance between plant and animal, the aquarium must contain some green things. A bit of water milfoil will do, or any other pond weeds; those with floating leaves are prettiest. There may even be room for a little water lily. Leave it to the snails to lick the walls of the aquarium clean, and to change the water from time to time I shall show the Bud the principle of the siphon. It was he who first saw the school, or rather kindergarten, of minnows that I captured in my net. He is rather afraid of the big crayfish that went into the aquarium with a splash. Its pincers look hostile, and it is in an irritable mood, as its eggs are being carried beneath it in the crook of its terminal segments. Dragon-fly larvæ, too, have a tigerish look, quite unlike their adult selves.

As time goes on the live stock may need replenishing, for fierce encounters take place and foe eats foe until a few prodigious monsters, generally all of one species, survive and may even fall ravenously upon each other. But half the joy of an aquarium is in collecting its inhabitants, and much of the rest consists in the emerald beauty of sunlight transmitted through its watery depths, and in the ejaculatory excitement of a small onlooker.

April 27.

Beloved of the Bud is the quaint Jack-in-the-pulpit. Loving rich woods and low, moist places, this goodly little preacher sticks to his pulpit from now on for all of a month. A long sermon, but as he preaches silently, I never weary of him.

Jack-in-the-pulpit is the rich relation of the lowly skunk cabbage, and like that plant has a complex structure. The "Jack" is a spike or spadix on which hundreds of tiny flowers, some male, some female, are disposed. The "pulpit" is but a leaf, strangely

modified, like the great white cowl of that still more princely relation, the calla lily.

When I was a child I was basely deceived by an older boy into eating the tuber of Jack-in-the-pulpit, and I have never forgotten the terrible smarting of my tongue. But to the Indians, Jack was a regular staple of the diet. They managed to eat it not because they had iron tongues, but by boiling the tubers in several waters. In this way the acrid matter is drawn out and thrown off, and the "Indian turnip" becomes a very palatable, starchy vegetable.

April 30.

The second month of our heady adventure is drawing to a close in the long dusk of this the last day of April. The first of my journal is filled now. I flip the pages over; before me lie two hundred clean, unwritten sheets, mysterious, inviting. What events shall befall me that will be written in gold or blood upon these pages of the future? Can I keep the Bud and Narcissa in safety?

Will the thin trickle of gold from the roaring presses in the basement of a city building keep alive the rapture of these blue twilights when Narcissa comes out of the door, prettily flushed from the oven's heat, and leans against the doorframe, looking at me trustingly as I walk and smoke before the house?

The air is full of the thrumming of the frogs and tree toads, and the whir of insect wings. In this little valley all is peace tonight, except for the faint but disturbing sound of traffic on the distant highroad, reminding me that the world and its problems are never far away. Puffs of warm air from down the valley blow up to my cheek, promising the kindlier days of summer, when the fruit trees by the kitchen door will ripen and pour largess in our laps. I can snatch a look from the reefs ahead, back upon the course that we have plotted, and count the knots that we have sailed, and say, or barely say—so far, so good. But to Narcissa I am the voice in the night that sings out with the bells, "All's well! All's well!"

MAY

May 3.

The Bud, pattering through the lush and leafy woods, made one of those happy discoveries that star the early, soon forgotten days of one's life. He met a mandrake, outpost of a quaint colony of them, and, peeping under its green umbrella, found the waxen blossom.

It was an occasion for parental wisdom to expand. I told him how the flower would be followed by the lemon-shaped berry that flavors those honey-colored jellies on his mother's shelf. I warned him of the poison in the leaves and rootstocks, and pulling up the mandrake I took the ovary out of the flower and split it crosswise with my penknife, to show him the gleaming internal beauty, the symmetrical cells closely packed with greenish tiny ovules awaiting fertilization. He only widened fathomless blue eyes, and trotted on down the path, the May apple held over his head for a parasol.

May 8.

The old Briary place is a ruin, but there hangs about it still a ghostly magnificence that clothes its tottering pillars with dignity. They rise to the second story, those pillars, and march around all four sides of the faded white house. I wonder what has become of the Briarys, that their lovely old home, extreme and proud in its remote setting, should have been allowed to lapse to so pitiful an estate? I wonder, too, what early Briary, perhaps with memories of gracious Georgian England, built the place and founded here his hopes? And what further Briarys sauntered elegantly down the four long galleries, or there trailed lace and satin skirts? These are conjectures that for Narcissa and me are endlessly rich with glamour.

But now for a little while life returns to the old ruin, for the wistaria on the front portico is in bloom. Heavily odorous, haunted by golden insects the day long, it hangs a purple curtain before the wide door

that must once have stood open in welcome to guests. And we two dwellers in what once was the humble lodge now lord it over the valley, and come unbidden to drink up the perfume of the wistaria.

Down on the coastal plain there are two native wistarias, but this giant vine is of the oriental species. Many hands passed on the heritage to this western country, but Robert Fortune's name stands bravest in the list.

Robert Fortune—adventurer-botanist of the early years, whose unadorned diary reads like a novel! On the very cruise when he was bringing home wistaria in a little coastwise junk along the China Seas, he was set upon by pirates. His cowardly crew crouched in the bottom of the boat, while Fortune alone kept the deck and blazed away at his pursuers until a friendly wind took his boat and scudded it out of peril.

The only quality of wistaria that fits it to the heroic measures of that story is the monster power of its stems. The downward pull of the roots, combined with the stran-

gling coil of its stems, makes it a more marvelous tensile engine than many a block and pulley. The porch of the old house will not stand through many more Maytimes.

May 12.

In the city to-day an old black man on the street held out to me hands full of golden primroses. They were brought, he said, from Mount Vernon, and sold for the benefit and maintenance of Washington's estate.

For more than a month, in the earlier Spring of the Old World, the flower girls of Fleet Street have been selling the primrose to Londoners. It is a flower as English as the woolsack. Lord Beaconsfield took it as the emblem of his party, the Primrose League, and it was primroses Queen Victoria sent to his funeral. It is as startling to come upon the bright, little, yellow faces in our streets as it would be to meet a troop of Elizabethan children.

But it is not of Merrie England that the

primrose speaks to me, but of Charles Darwin. For with this modest, common flower Darwin performed some of his greatest experiments and made portentous discoveries. What he found, by experimental fertilization, was the fact that there are two kinds of flowers in the primrose, and that inbred, an infertile race resulted; crossbred, a healthy and prolific progeny. In after life he always averred that his work on primroses was the neatest bit of experimental science he ever performed.

May 15.

I have just been up in the woods for four hours, fighting brush fires which some fool had started, I suppose, under the compulsion of the time-honored and ineradicable belief that it "improves" the soil to set fire to last year's weeds and burn out the humus. Tired, smudged, with the soles of my shoes thoroughly scorched, and the hot ashes of the fire settled in my temper, I came upon a patch of the crowfoot violet. With its two upper

petals pansy-purple, its three lower pale violet, and its leaves like the imprint of a bird's foot, it is the handsomest Viola of our country.

I stooped down and picked a handful where they bloomed amid sterile, quartz pebbles and the thin shade of dead chestnut trees, and my weariness and annoyance slippped away. There is something wondrously soothing about picking flowers, and while gathering violets sounds rather like an occupation for a young lady of the crinoline age, I will recommend it to ministers of state as the cure for their fatigues. As I gathered, three bright-eyed little negro girls came and picked near me. I knew that they intended to sell the flowers, and my sentiments are opposed to this. I even subscribe to a society that crusades against commercial exploitation of wild flowers. But in that low murmur of giggling, whispered talk, in those swift motions of little black fingers surely there was nothing that could be charged with the ponderous crime of commercial exploitation. There was only an innocent delight of the selfsame sort that I was finding myself.

May 20.

The western sky was melting gold, so that the trees atop the ridge opposite the Acorn stood blackly against that glow. We sat on the stoop, Narcissa and I, our feet on the hollowed doorstone sunk deep in the moss.

"If you had one wish, what would you wish?" Narcissa dreamily asked. "I know what *I* should wish," she went on, without waiting for my answer. "For us two to be granted the fate of Philemon and Baucis. Do you remember?"

Yes, I remembered that kindly old pair, grown rich in love through a lifetime of poverty and happiness together, and blessed with a green and leafy immortality—translated into two great trees whose boughs, intertangled, murmured together all the Summer days, whose roots in the sweet darkness of the earth twined together.

And if such a gracious perpetuity has been vouchsafed to others, surely it is a noble soul that now inhabits the big tulip tree over the

spring. Straight as an arrow for forty feet, with a smooth, clean bole, it shoots into the air, and then spreading enormous, ancient limbs, it casts its benignant shade over a mighty circle. In the wind its leaves ripple and glint like those of a poplar; its big orange and gold petals are drifting now to the smooth stones around the spring, and the bees are loud among its blossoms. For height and girth and ancient lineage it has but two rivals among the forest kings of eastern America, the cypress and the sycamore.

Like those two trees it boasts descent from a dim past. Its flowers betray it as a member of the magnolia family; its curious leaves, like a square with a bite taken out of the top, are so unlike any other foliage of to-day that it is easy to realize that the tulip tree waxed once in another geologic age. Great was once its range—all of Europe and even in Arctic lands. To-day it is, like so many other Tertiary plants, confined to the eastern United States and eastern Asia. But though its kingdom is shrunk, wherever it grows it is still a lordly monarch.

May 23.

On this day in 1707, at Rashult in Sweden, was born a poor Swedish boy who was to bring the natural sciences out of the chaotic metaphysics of medieval scholasticism into the sane order in which we find them now. Linnæus has been variously gauged by latter-day naturalists. To those who know him only as the author of the *Species Plantarum* and other dry catalogues in Latin, he seems indeed to have had no more than a dry intelligence, indefatigably classifying and describing. Systematic botany and zoölogy present no very inspiring vistas in themselves, and without knowing what zeal and fire dwelt in the personality of great systematists like Linnæus we cannot greatly interest ourselves in the men or their works.

But it illumines the pages of the *Species Plantarum* to remember Linnæus dancing the polka with country wenches, or before his door of an evening, with his long pipe glowing, watching his students gambol in their

hours of recreation. The field trips of his classes must have been jolly affairs, by all accounts, from which Linnæus and his pupils returned, with flutes and drums and viols playing and banners fluttering, to the gray old walls of Uppsala University where the class broke up amidst cheers of "Vivat Linnæus!" Imagine the collecting expedition of a modern professor terminating in any such hilarity! His colleagues would look out of their air-tight laboratory windows, and tap their foreheads, and the regents of the university would doubtless make a rapid change in their faculty.

Linnæus made many a mistake; his ambition was unabashed, for not only did he try his hand at classifying animals, but he sought to dispose the minerals into genera and species. But from his old apple-cheeked person there breathes across the ages something refreshingly natural. The out-of-doors glowed in his veins. He knew little of the microscope, still less of the test tube and the atomic theory. But though in the eyes of science he is now esteemed no more than a primitive, a pioneer, I like him all the better

for it! Who, after all, cuts a grander figure than the man who breaks the trail? In the golden age of the naturalist, science was something rugged and half blocked out, and dealt in living things and wild things. The fashion to-day is to reduce the natural sciences to terms of chemistry and physics. This is certainly proper enough, but if people would still use their eyes and ears it might be found that the living world was not all charted and explored. Darwin discovered marvels with the placid flora of an English countryside.

May 28.

In the deep, pine woods behind the old Briary place the needly ground is bright with fairylike Lady's Slipper. And in the rich loam beneath the deciduous trees that crown the heights above the river is here and there the rare Golden Slipper.

This loveliest of our orchids is, it seems to me, peculiarly a child of our country; I have found it as well among the granite

bowlders of New England pine copses, and in the bogs of that wild and lovely country, the Indiana dunes. Then why is it that people *will* be sentimental about orchids, calling them exotic, rare, unhealthy? In Spanish moss, giant cactus, Indian pipes, and squaw-root there is a spirit of far eerier strangeness, nor are the orchids half so rarely found as many another species. And they are honest little blossoms, these Lady's Slippers, drawing their nourishment from good earth pungent with pine needles. Yet I have heard the most extraordinary indictments against orchids—that they are unwholesome, unnatural, parasitic. In days supposedly less enlightened, curious healing powers were ascribed to them because their subterranean parts bear some resemblance to the human form, and one orchid, *Serapias Helleborine,* was so prized for its alleged virtue that early colonists brought it over to America, and it is now naturalized among us.

But the Lady's Slipper is our own—so much our own I choose to use its other title, one so purely indigenous it makes a fit crown —Moccasin flower. In the silent file of those

bright orchids through the shadowy woods there is something like the swift, stealthy tread of the moccasined feet of the red men. Cinderella's slipper was of hard, bright glass; the orchid's is as soft as doeskin.

May 30.

The tide of Spring is at the full when laurel bursts into bloom. Delicate flowers like Spring Beauty mark the infancy of the year, but when the season has grown comes laurel, gay and fresh and sturdy.

Bursting out of their curious prismatic bud forms, the laurel flowers appear in showy dome-shaped masses, each flower like a little, old-fashioned, china cup with angled sides. They call it laurel, in the city, but I am a countryman and choose to follow an old country custom by which it is called "calico bush." Certainly the stiff and starchy prim flowers, with their white petals regularly patterned in pink, look like little girls in clean print frocks.

A wondrous mechanism is concealed within

the tiny working of this flower. Each stamen, bearing the precious load of golden pollen, is bent over like a flexible rod, the upper end tucked into a tiny concavity in the side of the nearest petal. Touch one of these stamens with a twig, and one may see that the taut filament suddenly flies out of its niche, showering the pollen from its golden anthers.

Just this happens when a nectar-drinking moth comes to the flower. Blundering about among its stamens, she shakes them loose and they dust with pollen all her hairy body. When she visits the next flower she will carry this fertile load and dust the green stigmas.

The laurel is as clever as it is dainty, and well enough knows how to care for itself. Its flower stalks are so sticky that no crawling insect like a thieving ant can reach the honey cup above and rob the nectary without aiding the plant in cross-fertilization. Its leaves are poisonous, and many a young lamb, eager to nibble the first green thing, is sickened by the laurel leaf.

JUNE

June 3.

For those who have always lived in the city the coming of June may mean no more than the season of straw hats and open street cars; but to country people June and the heavy odor of elder blossom are as one. A month ago the feathery leaves and young green canes of the elder shot up from the muck of the thickets along the wood road, and to-day the elder stands full blown, a queenly flower, with its hundreds of tiny blossoms displayed in a broad parasol cluster.

There is something in the odor of elder, and the sound of honey bees buzzing in it, that brings to my mind inevitably the long hot midday of June in childhood, with big clouds sailing by—

Noontime and June time
Down along the river—

Since that momentous day in American history when, like good followers of Mahomet, we decided to forswear the wine cup, there has been a surreptitious interest in the big, dark, juicy berries of the elder. But I doubt that the city man I met to-day in the mosquitoey swamps where the elder grows, toiling to collect its potent blossoms, his derby pushed back from his sweating brow, gathered more pleasure than I who only idled past catching the fragrance to store in memory, as bees do honey in the comb. As a child, though, I too had a practical use for the elder—I made it into whistles. It is easy to push out the pith and then, by making a neat, crescent opening and blocking one end, I had a pipe that Pan might envy. Pan was indeed the deity to pipe to, for the elder is believed in the Old World to be sacred to the fairies. Dark things befall those so ruthless as to root it up, and in their beds those reckless ones are made to feel the tortures endured by the roots as they were torn, amid shrieks not attuned to mortal ears, from the old earth.

June 8.

"Escaped from old gardens," is all that the manuals of botany vouchsafe concerning the personality of Bouncing Bet. But what a tale hangs thereupon! Brought over from the Old World long ago, for the delight of Colonial ladies, Bouncing Bet was, in those naïve days when garden flowers were bred to few of the sophistries of modern times, a favorite child of the plantation garden.

But what of Bouncing Bet to-day? She has become a little gamin in a gay pink dress, living out her days like a gypsy along the roadsides. She has run away from respectable society, and now dabbles her toes up and down all the ditches and plays all Summer in the vacant lots of cities. Polite people long ago stopped speaking to her, and cut her off their Spring planting lists. And so Bouncing Bet has been "dropped." She turns out, anyway, to be nothing but the washerwoman's daughter, for her roots are full of a juice that, mixed with water, will

make suds. Be it granted, though, that the washlady's daughter is a pretty thing, making many a roadside and city lot gay that would otherwise be unsightly and most drear.

June 10.

One swallow, I agree, cannot make a summer, but for me one singing meadow lark is June incarnate. True, he is my neighbor the whole year around, and is no more a denizen of the daisy-spangled, upland meadows than the low, windy, salt marshes of the Tidewater. There, when winter has locked the creeks, and separate crystals of ice glitteringly encase each blade of salt grass on the marshes, I still have heard his sweet, windy, whistling cry.

But now in the gay, exultant full tide of Summer, when big, white clouds go by like bellied sails, and breezes wave the Queen Anne's lace, comes weather all the meadow lark's.

"Et-see-dee-ah," and "pseedee et silio,"

he calls sweetly after us as we wade, Narcissa and I, knee-deep in the sunny grass of the upland meadow. His lisping, merry, clinking call seems at times ventriloquistic. Is the dear bird calling from the grass, five feet away, or is he pouring his music from the sky, out of sight in the deep summer blue? As his song comes down the breeze Narcissa laughs for very joy at his baffling witchery. The field is full of meadow larks; they are ringing changes on their pretty chimes all around us, nor do we, as we pass, ever once flush one from his hidden choir stall.

June 12.

These are the days when the insects inherit the earth. All day and all night their humming chorus prevails, of voices so thread-like thin that only their mighty numbers make them audible. The insects alone of all the heterogeneous dwellers in our world inhabit with equal triumph the air, earth, and water. With the coming of the warm days

they claimed the Acorn, too, for their own. Lazily buzzing, the flies carved incredible geometric arcs through the heavy air, or bumped moodily against inaccessible corners of the ceiling. At night the moths danced giddily to death in the flame of our candles, and later the mosquitoes sang high, thin malice into an ear burrowing in the hot pillow. For by no ways and means that I could conjure were screens to be afforded.

But out of the unplumbable depths of Narcissa came another revelation of the unexpected. She came downstairs last evening with her arms full of pink gauze.

"Isn't it lovely?" she said, over the top of the rosy cloud.

"Is it a ball gown?" I asked respectfully.

"It's the net from peach baskets," said the amazing one. "They were such a ravishing color I never could bear to throw them away —I've been collecting them for ages."

And she sat down and threaded her needle.

So all day we have gazed out into a happily flushed world, as though through rose glasses, while the flies hummed impotently in the hot sunshine outside. To-night the

baffled June bugs bump clumsily against our trim screens, and the moths flutter there like ghostly fingers pleading entrance.

June 13.

Early last Spring I recognized a clump of old-fashioned, maiden pinks in the neglected garden. And now they are in bloom, prim and fresh as Watteau shepherdesses.

The dandy with stick and spats may have for his buttonhole the carnation, that elaborate double flower which is generally quite sterile. The old-fashioned pink, with its spicy aroma of cloves, its graceful salver shape and its dainty single petals, for my inelegant khaki!

While these old favorites, brought from Europe, are gracing my garden, I have found several native species in the rocky woods along the river—the wild pink, its petals, nearly crimson in shade, arranged like a five-pointed star, the bladder campion with puffy calyx striped purple-brown, and the starry campion of elegantly fringed

petals. Slowly, as the dusk creeps on, the night-flowering catchfly opens its large, white blooms that may still be seen for a short time at dawn, if one is up betimes of a Summer morning. But they close while the dew is still upon them. Pale-winged night moths visit them by starlight, sending long, curling tongues deep into the tubular calyx for nectar, and so fertilizing the strange, white flower that seems as ephemeral as moonlight.

It is easier to observe the sleepy catchfly, that opens in bright sunshine for a little while in the morning and goes to bed by noon. Just below each flower is a ring of black and sticky exudation, like the gummy rings sometimes painted on orchard trees. This prevents ants and other nectar robbers, who would be useless for fertilizing purposes, from climbing up the stem into the honey cup. I have found as many as a dozen crawling insects, as well as many flies, caught in this natural fly paper. It does not appear that the plant eats the insects as does the pitcher plant. Moreover, the defensive habit certainly has drawbacks, for I generally find from twenty to fifty of the catchfly's

own seeds stuck fast, to their destruction, in the glutinous area.

June 16.

Narcissa and I sit late upon the stoop, these warm moonlight nights. There is a still, white awe upon the shadowy woods that lays a finger of silence upon us. "On such a night as this" so perfect is our Eden that I hold my breath lest the slender thread of my good luck in the chancy trade I have taken be snapped short, lest some sudden, omnipotent hand snatch away this bounty of beauty that we have made our home. As though she understood my thought, Narcissa lays a hand upon my own. And I am quieted, content to breathe the heavy sweetness poured upon the silver air.

For the Japanese honeysuckle is in bloom over the hills, sending its heady perfume out into darkness. With its pale, gold flowers and its stealthy, conquering growth, it has been called "the yellow peril." It multiplies with a rapidity no native plant seems to

equal. But it has at least a propensity for covering unsightly places, like railroad embankments, tin-can lots, dead trees, and ugly fences, transforming all into a living mass of odorous beauty.

The flowers of the Japanese honeysuckle are not always yellow. They open in a dress of virginal white; not until fertilized do they turn yellow, as if in signal to hovering night moths that the nectary is empty and the seed already set. Narcissa calls the honeysuckle "maid-and-matron vine."

June 21.

On this, the Summer solstice, the humming of the cicada began. And with that sound, Summer is issued in.

I used to fancy that the end of Spring and the coming of Summer could be marked as with a line when some flower began to bloom, and variously I fixed upon mimosas, magnolias, and Queen Anne's lace. But I have known them all to fail as signs, and certainly hot weather has nothing to do with the mak-

ing of Summer, for what is hotter than some of those April days when the sun beats down through trees whose budding leaves cast no shade, and a warm languor overspreads the world?

I hold now that the first sound of the cicada means that Summer has come, when with the buzz of an elfin sawmill he begins at first slowly, and then waxing to a great crescendo, the uproar of his song. Entomologists believe that he may be stone deaf; I hope for his sake he is. If I wrought myself into that rising fury I should not care to hear my own voice in my ears. By degrees, like the long Summer itself, his song diminishes, until it ceases in a series of jerky starts and halts, like a machine running down. But hot, hot, hot are the days when the cicada sings longest and loudest, and hot the song itself. And at night, to take his place, the katydid sets the air jarring. It is full Summer when these two choristers make resonant the days and nights.

To come upon the discarded shard of a cicada, clinging still, a translucent, brittle ghost, to the deep-creviced bark of an oak,

puts me into a moment of wonder, as though I had blundered into the world of the Little People and found here the hulk of a dragon done to death by some valiant thrust of a grass-blade javelin.

June 25.

The tossing shuttle of the year weaves a many-colored pattern of flowers, but in all the bright warp and weft there are few strands of blue. There are blossoms enough that go under the name of blue—gentian and iris and violet, but almost always into each of these and their sisters creeps some adulterant strain of purple. But the common little chicory is a real blue.

We prize and cherish splendid garden blooms, we flatter them with care and admiration, yet we are heedless of the debt we owe to the chicory. Among the cinders of railroad embankments, amid the rubble of empty lots and dumping grounds, there spreads the misty blue of chicory. What other flower has the hardihood and modesty

to choose for itself the waste places? True blue indeed!

It is by choice that chicory is a wildling. Like most weeds, it is an Old World plant, and was brought here as a garden crop. But it escaped and turned vagabond, and lives in the ditches now like other tramps.

As an adulterant of coffee it is notorious. There can be no doubt that a little chicory in coffee gives it a rich syrupy taste such as one notices in imported Turkish brands. And back in the nineties, which we are now pleased to call "gay," people grew chicory for this purpose extensively, but it never quite paid, and farmer folk looked askance at its innocent and baffling face.

However, the curly-leaved varieties are grown for salads, and there are other uses to which chicory can be put. Narcissa has boiled the young roots and served them with butter, and we found them tender and savory.

When I left home this morning for town, the chicory blossoms growing between the ties of the trolley tracks were wide blown and glorious. But when the hot Summer sun

had fallen down the western steeps and I came home weary, I found the chicory at Chinquapin all fast asleep. By what power can the plant wink its bright blossoms thus? The many-lensed eyes of Science have not found the answer.

June 28.

In the warm quiet of the garden night comes to me under the dim feathery shadow of the mimosa the acacia-powdery scent of its blossoms. Groping fingers upon the leaves find every one drooped upon its stalk, as though shrinking timidly from the dark.

This afternoon as I stood looking on in impotent rue at the ravages of a Summer cloudburst that suddenly turned to cold, cruel hail, I saw the shaking leaves of my tree close up. The reaction was so swift and so protective that I laughed outright, as though the mimosa had spoken or done somewhat else endearingly human. The storm over and a forgiving sun beaming once more on a battered and dripping gar-

den, the little tree revived with a grace as undismayed as a good-natured child who gets up cheerfully from a chastisement.

June 29.

The weather is hot and humid, the midges are merciless, and my insurance falls due on the first of next month. I went to the city to-day to urge speed upon a newspaper editor who has been considering at his Olympian leisure a series of Nature studies I had draughted for him. And learned that he had given the work to a sentimental spinster who gives pet names to the flowers and calls the fireflies fairies. I came home wondering how the insurance company could have been persuaded to put so high a value on my worthless life.

Narcissa's hands were cool and her voice untroubled.

"Don't worry. I've got wild strawberry shortcake for dinner. I discovered a berry patch in the open woods near the river."

I knew once a very young hamadryad with

dark hair and eyes like leaf-clogged pools, and thin, brown, scratched legs, who gave me wild strawberries and smiles of her deliciously stained lips.

And to think that in the end I married those shortcakes!

JULY

July 3.

All through the sultry gold of this long Summer day, when the big cumulus clouds, threatening with muffled thunder, were piling up in the west, the evening primroses, both the wild ones of the meadows and the big ones in my garden, have hid their eyes as though the sunshine hurt them. Now, when the sun is low, and the shadows lengthen on the lawn, and the thrush's cool song announces that the heat and fever of the day are done, then and then only does the evening primrose wake.

It is no small miracle, that slow awakening. The petals, all incurled as though in bud, unfurl before my very eyes, with the speed, barely visible, of the minute hand of a small clock, though not so regularly. Now there is a moment's pause when the motion is imperceptible; the petals seem to have caught. Then there is a swift little slip, and the flower has opened wider. What is this

mysterious spring within the primrose that can coil and uncoil the petals?

The true primrose (which is no relation) is connected with the name of Darwin and some of the great principles of modern botany, but the evening primrose boasts association with the two other men who have stood out most prominently in the field of original investigation in the study of evolution. For a primrose called *Œnothera Lamarckiana* was named for Lamarck, the great French naturalist whose theory of evolution was earlier than Darwin's, and about 1900 this plant became the subject of a series of significant investigations by a Dutch botanist named De Vries, whose concept of evolution was the third landmark along the path which Lamarck and Darwin had blazed.

Lamarck believed that evolution takes place by changes forced on animals and plants by environment; Darwin held to the idea of natural selection and the survival of the fittest, while De Vries, from his observations on the sudden and startling changes that took place in Lamarck's evening primrose, declared that the changing face of na-

ture is due to sudden internal alterations in the plant's heredity.

De Vries drew his conclusions from watching for a season a field of Lamarck's evening-primroses that had been brought to Holland from America, where alone they are native, but when he returned the next year to continue his investigations he found most of the field ploughed up. He wrote to America asking botanists to get him new plants, but though a diligent search has been made nobody has been able to find any *Œnothera Lamarckiana* in America. Some unlucky chance has destroyed this species in its native home, unless perhaps it lingers unknown in some neglected spot. A short cut to fame would be to turn up a single plant of this species in our country. If I were minded to undertake the search, I would begin somewhere in the Middle Atlantic states.

July 8.

Over the meadow, with undulant flight and voice, a goldfinch darted before me all the

way on my walk to the post office. He glinted as bright as the goldenrod, the coreopsis and the sunflower that he loves. Few are the birds that sing upon the wing, but here was one, keeping up a gay cadenza as he swung along. Only at his dinner is the goldfinch silent, hopping about among the dandelions and the thistles, taking the tares for his portion.

Bringing back the letters, I was teased all the way by the puzzle of what it reminded me of—that looping, bounding flight. With swift short wing strokes he climbed a few feet, and then like an arrow, wings closed, slipped with delicious fluent grace down an unseen slope. And now I have it—the flight was like music, like a waltz with a melodic lilt, a hesitation in the most piquant moment of the rhythm.

July 9.

"Can that be gorse?" asked our young English friend, out for the day, when she saw the golden acres of the bare hillside

across the river, sloping toward the sun. Little wonder she fancied herself for a moment back on her native Hampstead Heath, for a cousin of the Old World gorse, and one with a strong family resemblance, is our native wild indigo.

It is everywhere in bloom now, and I soon found some for my friend on the slope where we stood. I showed her its low, broad, bushy habits, its three cloverlike leaflets, and its profusion of tiny golden flowers that, examined minutely, are, as in all the pea family, curiously like little butterflies with folded wings. By some odd and delightful affinity, I have found, clouds of our common little yellow butterflies are drawn to flutter over the billowy fields of wild indigo.

The leaves of the wild indigo in my specimen sheets have blackened in drying, due to the presence of indigo in the system of the plant. The wood-wise early settlers gathered it to dye those beautiful old hand-woven fabrics that antique collectors now prize so highly. It was not the true indigo of tropical regions and did not produce so fine a dye, but still it gave a soft and lovely shade

of blue. To-day coal-tar dyes have driven the old-fashioned vegetable dyes from the market. But whatever may be said for synthetic dyes, they do not, as they fade, turn such exquisite tints as the old-fashioned dye. As a chemical dye fades its hue actually changes, in many cases. A vegetable dye merely softens as it grows old, and retains, even for centuries, essentially the same color.

July 15.

I went outdoors in the sunny quiet to draft those articles a benign publisher requested, but leaning back in my long chair I caught sight of a buzzard hanging on tilting wing in the far blue freedom of the sky, and all serious endeavor went glimmering up toward that high, ranging indolence.

A turkey buzzard a-wing is the concrete of lazy, speculative, high-riding thought. I have lain upon a ridge of those kindly mountains that rise far to the south of this little garden, watching, the hot afternoon long, a buzzard spiraling nobly about high over-

head, apparently the only creature alive in the still silence. Whether I wandered near the heart of ultimate mystery or merely lounged away blank time, I am as much in doubt about now as when I descended the mountain.

Distance certainly lent part of the enchantment. For seen at close range the buzzard is a hideous grotesque, his long, hooked bill white, his bright red head wholly bald of feathers as though picked raw in a fight, his aspect fatuous and cruel—the very caricature of a bird. He looks then the scavenger that he is; one wishes him well at his dirty task, and turns away disgusted. Yet when a coming storm piles nebulous mountains toppling toward the zenith, the buzzard slowly mounting toward his throne, sometimes two miles above earth, becomes a king among the birds.

July 17.

The stigma of degeneracy appears to have fallen on the dayflower, the little blue weed

that blooms so transiently around the Acorn's back door these days. One petal and one sepal of the three look withered, and of the six stamens, half are misshaped abortions.

Linnæus, who had the first go at giving the Latin names to plants, was not above a waggish prank. He named the dayflower Commelina, after the brothers Commelin, Dutch botanists. One of them was lazy, unobservant, and unscientific, while the other two industriously published. Picking out the partly withered floral structure of the dayflower to honor these brothers was an insult to which it was dangerous to retort. To acknowledge oneself affronted was to admit the fault.

July 18.

Narcissa asked me to stop on my way out from town and have a prescription filled. While I waited the compounding of the mysterious powders, I fell to examining the white

jars upon my druggist's shelves, and I was surprised to see how many old-fashioned vegetable medicaments are still in vogue. I read there such cabalistic signs as Sem. Cardam., Pulv. Chinch., Rhiz. Rhei., Tinct. Jalap., Tinct. Sang., Fol. Acaciæ, and many another in abbreviated Latin, which being translated mean cardamom seeds, powdered chinchona bark, rhubarb root, tincture of jalap, tincture of bloodroot, and acacia leaves. And I was still more surprised to learn that there is yet a brisk traffic in ginseng. As I found a little of it blooming up in the woods a few days ago I was reminded of the one and only time I ever encountered the "sang" diggers, as they are called.

I was botanizing in a flowery mountain mead in North Carolina and had approached the foot of a steep, dark peak, heavily wooded. Out of the forest, scuttling down the slope, came the sang diggers, three tall men, as worn and skinny as opium addicts, muttering to themselves and digging furiously at the ginseng with their trowels. Behind them came their families, gray women,

bronzed boys, and gaunt girls, inspired by the same haste and mumbling fury. I had never seen greed loosed upon the woods before; may I never see it again! They spoke no word to me, but eyed me in hostility. I, too, was digging for "yarbs," and doubtless they counted me for a rival. I was often asked in those woods if I was a "yarb doctor."

It is not that the sang diggers ever use the root themselves. It is all sold in the Chinese trade, where, owing to the excessive demand of a superstitious and diseased population for the venerated ginseng, and to the great scarcity of the Chinese species, incredible prices are fetched for it. The Chinese name is Jin-chen, which I am told means "manlike," from the bifurcated appearance of the root. By the ancient Doctrine of Signatures, by which it was believed that every plant bore the stamp of its human use, it was supposed that the manlike root would cure any ill that plagued a man, in what part of his anatomy soever. I wonder how many generations of sick Chinese have died happy in this belief?

July 21.

A mile down the road, in the meadow near the tracks, lives a camp of gypsies. Trudging along beside the highway ditch to-day I met some of their fat, old wives and pretty, brown children who were picking a brilliant blue weed. I have a predilection for gypsies, without being able to admire them beyond the impression they make on the eye. The little boys have a shy alertness that is winning, and certainly the young maidens, brown little saplings of thirteen and fourteen summers, can be very comely to look upon even though the sun has kissed them. I know that in five years they will be fat matrons for whom there is no future but to grow fatter and more mammalian till the marvelous black hair falls out and only a few gray wisps stand out strangely from the dark scalp.

But even in the old women there is a rich, oily vigor; they remind me of some sort of

lush and rank tropical weed vegetation. And into old age they have the daring to wear brilliant scarves—incredible juxtapositions of vermilion, sulphur, cerise, and copper green—and ponderous loops of gold in the ears, and a jingling dozen of silver hoops upon their wrists. Even the men have the courage to flaunt a little color.

The more I think and see of gypsies, the more they remind me of gaudy weeds, like those cosmopolite waifs, those seaport bummers that may be found the world over. The gypsies came over in the steerage; the weed seeds doubtless stole their passage, stowaways in the baggage and the ballast of the hold.

The big blue weed that the gypsies were picking to sell in the city was just such a one. As I came nearer to the bending group I saw that it was the Blue Devil, *Echium vulgare,* of the Old World and of that hardy tribe, the Borage family. There is not another group of plants more fitted to survive in the keen and desperate competition of a crowded, man-ruled world like Europe.

With their bristly stems they ward off the inroads of browsing animals, and with their hooked fruits they easily attach themselves to wool and fur and clothing, making themselves a pest to sheep and the wool industry, and most successfully distributing themselves over the face of the earth. There is even a peculiar flora that regularly springs up around wool spinning factories, where the burry and dirty wool is thrown out in waste heaps. There strange plants from all over the world, Australia, Abyssinia, the western states, Europe, spring up—plants not found in any manual of American botany. Most of them, be it noted, are the Borages.

Yet the tenacious vagabonds of the Borages give something in return for the trouble that they cause as weeds. For like the gypsies they array themselves in gay, endearing colors. Few of our native wild flowers have what an artist would admit to be a clear, true red, or a true blue; purple creeps into the hues of most flowers that we, quite loosely, call red or blue. Not so the Borage family; that dreadful weed of sheep

meadows, the Hound's Tongue, *Cynoglossum officinale,* is the clearest of deep reds; the Blue Devil is a shade of true but very dark blue, almost like the midnight sky.

July 23.

"Nothing," said Taine—I paraphrase from memory—"in Nature means anything to us except as it forms a background to human actions. These lofty trees, the noble prospects, these beds of roses, these pebbles in the garden path are void of interest or meaning if we know not what lovers whispered together underneath the elms, what fair hands once plucked these blossoms, and what feet, hastening on errands of delight or hate, once trod these stones."

A very French view of Nature, that, concerned above all with emotions, a hyper-civilized attitude, born in a continent where Nature is kept combed and scoured and dressed by human hands, and the very air

is "twice-breathed." To Taine the Alps must have appeared a peculiarly cold, desolate and depressing phenomenon—untidy, unconquerable, incomprehensible. And I must confess I find the viewpoint sentimental; there is in it no love of Nature for its own sake, and no love of the adventure of pure discovery. Taine would have felt no thrill could he have set foot on some peak where man had never trod before; he would not have exchanged places with stout Balboa on a peak in Darien, gazing upon a limitless, sailless ocean. For him the artifacts of Versailles, the tame and pretty garden nooks where conspiratorial couples courted.

But to-day, for once, I was in sympathy with his views. Rambling the low wet woods of Analostan Island, down river, I felt a certain depression fall upon my spirits. In those midge-haunted emerald darknesses, the sky shut away and the mucky earth pulling my feet, the meaningless animosity of Nature for a time overpowered me. And then of a sudden I came upon the cellar of an old house. I had heard of that one-time man-

sion, swallowed now in the desolation of marshy forest. Once it belonged to George Mason, patriot and scholar. Guests were entertained there, the lawn was hung with lanterns, and fireflies came from the wood and danced among them. Wine was poured; toasts were passed; women plied with intrigue their husbands' trade of politics. Today all is a ruin.

But overhead I saw a tree in flower. It was the Tree of Heaven, brought long ago from China to Europe and from Europe carried by the colonists to Virginia. Among all those gloomy elms and river birches, the great old tree stood for something human and brave and kindly. It looked the alien that it was, but alien to its surroundings, not to the man beneath its shade. Man had loved it and tended it and set it out to give him delight. I never saw a sturdier example of this tree, which as one knows it in the back yards of New York is merely like an overgrown, stringy sumac with a bad odor. My tree measured full sixty feet in height, and its girth was larger than my arms could embrace.

July 26.

I have come back from a ramble in which Narcissa would not join me.

"Go along with you!" she cried scornfully, waving a dishcloth at me. "Go sniff the taint of the wicked city—the Bud and I prefer to forget its existence. Yours is a perverted taste."

But I like to knock about the meadowy fringes of a human center. The plumes of blue smoke from factories, and a distant busy hum are as much as I care to know of most towns. Those sights and sounds, blended with the whistling of meadow larks and the odor of truck crops and the swaying bumble of lone trolley cars like big yellow bees in the clovery fields, are knowledge intimate enough of the crazy herding together of my species.

I like the marshes where the blue flags wave, and dragon flies skim over the water, and the roadside ditches are rich in a flora which has come, gypsy like, from the Old

World. Best of all the weeds I like the sweet clover, which I have never missed from the neighborhood of any town. Ubiquitous, fragrant, and helpful to the soil is the sweet melilot. Melilot—Camelot—honey, and lutes, and my lady's bower—it wakes a foolish chain in my lazy mind. Very like that is my aimless rambling about the city's clover-broidered outskirts.

July 27.

To-day our ex-neighbor from across the hall in the flat building where we formerly existed penetrated to this barbarian wilderness. Teetering on high heels she picked her way up the path from the spring, where Narcissa caught sight of her just in time to adjust her own appalled countenance to a more suitable expression.

The black satin and the aigrette-adorned hat of our visitor followed Narcissa about all the corners of the little house which seemed to smile an amused greeting.

"How quaint it all is," said the lady dis-

paragingly. "How perfectly adorably picturesque."

As at last she departed from the house, trailing the echo of her sickly sweet voice, Narcissa closed the door and said:

"She's a dodder."

It was true. Not that she was doddering —not she of the sleek figure elegantly gowned. But she was like the dodder flower down by the marsh, a parasite that sapped but never gave.

That plant may now be seen at its best— or worst. In great splashes of morbid orange it ramps over bushes and low innocent herbs, entwining, sending in its suckers, sapping and slaying. It long ago gave up the task of making its own way in the world. Neither has it any green tissue where food is manufactured, nor can it stand alone, but must lie limply on other plants. It strikes root in no soil, and yet its seeds spring up in all places.

Akin to the morning-glory and the bindweed, the dodder has undergone a great degeneration as a result of its parasitic life. Its flowers are shrunk to an inconspicuous

size. And from those colorless blossoms comes forth an odor sickly sweet.

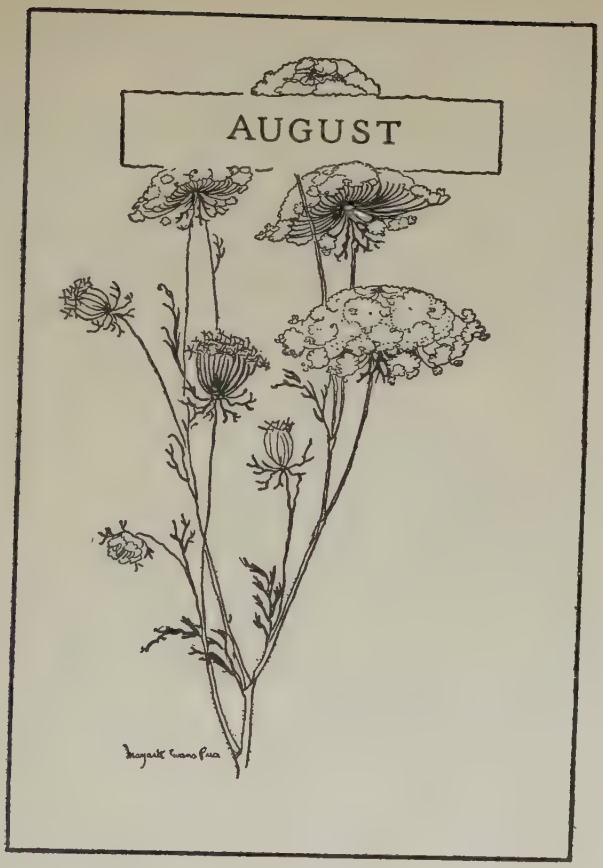
July 29.

I like the cat-tail with an unreasonable gusto. I like its regiments of glittering sword leaves waving menacingly from the swamps. I like the first green shoots of it in Spring, and its triumph over the marsh-lands in the Summer. I like its plump brown spikes, nicely fitted to the hand, and in November when winds lift the hoar seeds and scatter them abroad into the waters—whence they shall return an hundredfold—I am just childish enough to enjoy pulling the silky fruiting heads to pieces to see the down go flying.

I have discovered a waving acre of cat-tail swamp over beyond the western ridge, near the river. The marly bottom of the marsh is crackled by the sun and criss-crossed with beetle tracks; the pondweeds and delicate water flowers have gone to defeat, driven down by the drought, but the cat-tails con-

tinue their conquering march—no force can stop the awful, invisible creeping of those mud-burrowing rhizomes.

I like to think, staring at the hot, sun-bright legions of the bulrushes, how in the coastal lagoons of India, in the marshes of Belgium, in Australia, in Africa, the identical plant is growing. Ancient is its lineage; there were cat-tails long before the infant Moses found shelter in them on the shore of the Nile—millions of years before history was born. How many boys, in how many far-spread lands, have played as I played when I was small, in the bulrush brakes behind the school, when the clashing of leaf on leaf was as the rattle of swords, and the fruiting spears of the flowers, gone to downy seed, were the silken banners of valorous legions!


AUGUST

August 1.

The Eighth Month is here, ushered in by torrid weather, and great thunder-heads mount in the west toward close of day, while the pitiful earth yields up from its pores what moisture the usurious great sun has not already squeezed out of it.

Sleep on these windless nights would not be easy anyway, and there are times when the little secret chamber underneath the eaves, with its deep-set old windows, shutting out the wandering night breeze but not the seesaw of the tireless katydids, is no such cradle of quietude as on the nights of May when first the odor of honeysuckle filled all the room. While Narcissa slept last night I lay awake, planning and scheming, and repressing fears. Our friends have gone to the mountains or the seashore. But we have chosen our way, and here we must abide. Still, it was no summer cottage on Mt. Desert that I asked, but only to keep that

low-beamed ceiling over us. With white, reluctant feet sleep drew near me, and almost I had yielded to her, when the whip-poor-will began to call, and frightened her away.

Some time along in the middle of the Fourth Month, when a sweet April dusk was turning into night and the frogs trilled along the Run, I heard first his mysterious cries and loved them. He uttered but a few syllables and then was silent. As the season aged he has sung more loudly and longer, till last night, in the hot moonlight, he and the whip-poor-will chorus he woke made the hours in bed a torment. I counted his reiterations which reached the number of one hundred and eighty without a pause. I don't suppose he held his breath so long, but listening was quite as much of a strain as though he did. Deciding at last that the incorrigible bird was sitting on my rooftree, I got out of bed and paddled down outdoors and threw a stone at him. Of a bird-loving disposition, I confess that on this occasion I shot to kill, but my aim was bad. Yet he was silenced, and then only did I sleep.

As I lay happy in the cool of early morning, waiting for day, hearing only an even and beloved breathing, there came to me a few wandering cries from the vast throat of the nocturnal bird. How sweet then they sounded, less brassy than the dawn-crow of the cock, a gentle, lazy note that promised forth no clattering city daybreak with rattling carts and ominous hum of man's stirrings, but a country dawn, when one by one the stars wink out and little cool winds walk abroad.

August 4.

In the season of blue skies, when the west wind blows and the clouds billow by and the goldfinches swing over the meadows, the lovely Queen Anne's lace opens like a handkerchief and flutters in the breeze. Seeking the fields and the open places, it makes even vacant lots and waste ground beautiful. Where beauty is concerned the Umbellifer Family are the poor relations of the plant people, but there is something as royal in

the bearing of Queen Anne's lace as in its very name of regal, long-ago loveliness.

Yet an idol may have feet of clay, and the astonishing truth, of which you may assure yourself by pulling the plant up, is that Queen Anne's lace may be a monarch above, but underneath the meadow sod it is nothing but the garden carrot. Both wild and cultivated in the Old World, the carrot was early brought to America and has now escaped from gardens and is as thoroughly one of us as though it had taken out its naturalization papers.

Like many an immigrant, it has run wild, and the root of Queen Anne's lace is no such comestible as its cultivated kin. I have tried it, and found it tough and stringy and bitter, and I am obliged to write down Queen Anne's lace as a reversion to a lower ancestral type—to that condition, perhaps, in which five or ten thousand years ago man found it. The transformation, considering that there was then no science of horticulture, equals anything that is done to-day in the perfection of fruits and vegetables. All

honor then to some unhonored plant breeder of the misty past.

I can think of no other plant that opens in the peculiar way of Queen Anne's lace. I love to watch its slow unfolding, the whole inflorescence at first rolled upward and inward, then expanding to a flat saucer shape, becoming at last, as the flowers turn from green to white, a convex disk. But can any one tell me why in the center of each umbel there is one tiny, dark purple floret? Is this some glyph of cryptic meaning written there for eyes too blind to read?

August 7.

Long and sultry this August afternoon hung over us, and Narcissa went often to the door to look at the low, hot clouds in the west, and asked me if they would bring the rain.

"The rain crow seems to think so," I evaded, as I heard the drowsy voice of the yellow-billed cuckoo raised from the hot, dry woods—"*kuh-kuh-kuh-kuh-kuh-kuh, kuh,*

kuh, k . . . kuh . . . kuh . . . kuh" — a strange, unbirdlike, rattling cry beginning with the energy of a cicada praising the sun, but dying away as though from heat exhaustion.

The thought came to me that often as I had heard a yellow-billed cuckoo I had never seen one. The article on the desk before me had grown stale on my pen. I could not finish it while my moist hand stuck to the paper as I wrote and my brain went slowly soft with the torrid atmosphere I breathed. I got up and walked out, seeking what shade the woods offered, and looking for the bird.

"*Kuh . . . kuh . . . kuh . . .*"

The sound trailed away in the distance and I rambled on among the little dry legumes under the trees, not noticing where I went until I had penetrated a bramble thicket and come out near the highway where it runs along the hill above our valley.

High on the ridge in the woods a man stood, with a surveying instrument on a tripod, motioning mystically with his arm to a boy far away with a long pole striped like

a barber's sign. I stood in alarmed wonder. Surveying is the presage of Progress, and I am not a worshiper of Progress. I started up the hill to make inquiries, but in that minute the man with the tripod folded it up and disappeared over the ridge.

I turned home full of fearful surmise. But I dare say it was a topographic survey of some sort. And that is all that I can record to-day, except that as I neared home I saw a flash of sleek olive and bright buff that was the cuckoo I had sought.

August 9.

In the dry hickory woods these days the white snakeroot, like flecks of foam from a waterfall, is spread far and wide on the forest floor. A face of pure innocence in this lovely Eupatorium conceals a poisonous heart.

I remember once, toiling out of dense mountain woods into a clearing near the summit, hailing with joy the sight of a habitation, a great barn and numerous cribs and

outbuildings. I could see a run for the sheep, and young fruit trees in full leaf, and nothing for rustic delight seemed lacking except the blue twist of smoke arising from the chimneys.

As I drew nearer, something evil crept out to meet me, something like an odor of bad omen, though there was no smell but of the sweet lilac bee balm in the cow pastures. Not only was there no smoke, there were no sheep in fold, no cattle in the mountain meadow where their hoofs had left prints fossilized now in hardened mud. A roaring torrent that slanted across the clearing, chattering to itself about the airy spiral waterfall toward which it slipped along white quartz, made the only sound in that high eerie place.

I learned that death had been there and had taken a rich woman and her friend who went there to raise cattle on a model farm. All through the woods the little white snakeroot grew, and of it the cattle had eaten and their milk had been poisoned, and though warned by her country neighbors, the rich woman had drunk their milk and died of the

"milk-sick" which has the effect of lead poisoning.

August 11.

I have just been pulling out the wicked stramonium that springs up in our garden. No doubt it has sown itself here for all the years when this garden was ruled by the barbaric dynasty of the weeds, and I daresay it is indignant that I should dispute its usurped place. But it holds a secret too dangerous for the prying fingers of the Bud to find.

Poison is hinted in all that concerns stramonium, in the dark purple sap that rises like a tide from stem to petal, and in the rank, bitter, and sickly odor. The fluted corollas, that look like an old-fashioned talking-machine horn, are not without a certain tropic magnificence; in the weak fleshy stems, too, there is something reminiscent of the swift, grasping growth of an equatorial weed.

But in its seeds lurks madness. I have

heard that a company of British soldiers in India were induced to try some seeds. They all got a simultaneous idea that they were monkeys, and climbed trees and threw cocoanuts at each other. Brahmans and Mahatmas and such mystics take doses of stramonium to induce religious trances, and the seeds of a related species of California are ceremonially smoked by the Indians. I would not act like a monkey if I could prevent it, and I even waive the religious trances. Yet I admit the black seeds in my palm offer the temptations of curiosity.

The farmers call it Jimson weed. I used to wonder who Jimson was, and what he did so evil that this plant should be named after him. I learn now that the name is a corruption of Jamestown, for it seems that this weed made its appearance in the early Virginia colony soon after the white men came. Ships from the tropics doubtless brought it, but as in those days men believed in spontaneous generation they doubtless thought the accursed plant sprang, new born, from the soil of Jamestown.

August 12.

Music is any sort of sound we choose to think it. To some of my friends nothing will do but a Brahms symphony, with full orchestra, and even folk tunes have to be dressed up in a sophisticated harmonization. But to the tall black warrior of the Niger swamps the one tone of a drum is music; it is even speech, conveying from village to village, by slight changes in rhythm, news of war, triumph, or alarm.

And so to me the rattling cry of the kingfisher as I heard him on this summer day, fishing down river, is music that stirs me as the drum stirs the Nigerian. There are those who want everything in Nature to be sweet, to have a yielding, feminine grace. But I love the lusty and the harsh as well. I am no more sorry for the fish with whom our blue-clad diver will come up triumphantly than is the kingfisher himself.

That crested, arrogant tyrant is a better Izaak Walton than I am, for I remember a

night in the mountains when I was lost. I had no blankets, and no food beyond a bit of chocolate, and industriously I fished the roaring mountain brook in hopes of getting a nibble from a rainbow trout. I own I would have exulted to see his wild, flying form flash through the air on the end of my hook, to have laid his gasping body on the rocks and peeled away the magic shimmering scales. But I got nothing for my pains, and all the while a splendid feathered fisherman ranged up and down the brook catching his evening meal and angrily berating me for infringing on his riparian rights. As I lay stretched beside a campfire watching mountain mists engulf the moon, the kingfisher's weird cry rang out through the night, mocking me. It was a sleepy call, unlike his war whoop, a strange, stuttering rattle, as though in his sleep he dreamed of piscatorial exploits more marvelous than ever achieved by any of his tribe. Surely he visioned a great trout as big as a sturgeon, leaping up the runs and falls of that cold torrent, and by his very volume displacing the waters and making them wash over into the mountain

meadow starred with sleepy flowers. Surely in sleep he thought of himself pouncing prodigiously upon his prey and bringing it, fighting, to some sandy cove of that wild coast. And as I lay and shivered hungrily, I hated and I envied the boastful bird.

August 15.

All the way out on the trolley I figured on the back of an envelope with a stubby pencil. And it became apparent that I could carry my little household on the slender tight rope of income across the yawning chasm of this month's expenses—could carry all, that is, but the Incubus.

Months ago, in a bold moment, ensnared by a folder of glamorous plates and legends, I engaged myself in the purchase of an encyclopedia. For every volume there is a gray hair on my head. And half the payment is yet to be made.

"I figure," said Narcissa weightily—we were sitting in conference on the edge of the bed where the warm night wind stole in—

"that we are now in rightful possession of all the volumes through 'Pay to Pol.' But to look up anything further along in the alphabet gives me an awful feeling of borrowing."

"They're beginning to growl," I confessed, "Pol, or whoever it is we pay to. I've had several communications lately that rather resembled Black Hand letters."

So we totted up all the figures on the ragged envelope again, but nowhere was there a spare ten dollars to fling into the hungry maw of the Incubus.

Yet the monotonous comfort of the crickets put us at last beyond the reach of worries, in the other world of sleep, and today the Incubus had gone out of my mind when I came home in the late, gold light with the dust of the town upon me.

I found Narcissa only a faint voice from the sofa.

"No, I'm all right—only tired. But there's nothing in the house for dinner except muffins—dozens of 'em."

And a wan hand fluttered a handful of bills at me.

"What on earth—" I began.

"Muffins," she said, and her eyes closed wearily.

I got her a glass of water, and she sat up and talked.

"Blueberry muffins," she repeated, looking up at me with solemn brown eyes large in a tired little face. "I was a muffin man, you know, with a bell and a tray. On the highway." She took another drink. "And then I'd come back and bake some more," she concluded, "and sell those."

"Narcissa!" I cried in horror.

"It's all right," she said, and flapped the bills weakly. "Mrs. MacGregor had the Bud. And there were all those blueberries on the hill just waiting to be put in muffins. And now the Incubus is fed for this month."

The rest was lost in my coat collar. After a while she sat up and giggled.

"I encountered the Dodder," she said. "In a robin's-egg blue runabout. She bought two dozen."

"Good Lord," I groaned, "she'll have it all over town."

"That's all right," said the unruffled Nar-

cissa. "I told her I was selling them for a worthy charity. Blueberry Muffin Day, you know."

"Narcissa," said I sternly, "that was obtaining money under false pretenses."

"It wasn't," said she, undismayed. "Aren't we a worthy charity?"

And then we went out into the kitchen, and I ate nine muffins and a quart of milk, while Narcissa sat on the kitchen table and swung her feet and smiled.

August 17.

Mrs. MacGregor was agog this morning over the death of several Italian workmen who perished of eating *Circuta malculata* which they found growing in a ditch near Chinquapin, where they were repairing the road. They took it to be parsnip, and indeed it does belong to the treacherous Umbellifer family under which are grouped such innocuous herbs as parsley, celery, carrot, chevril, coriander, caraway, and parsnip. But these good plants keep doubtful

company with many deadly plants, and not the least of these is our water hemlock, the roots of which at first taste sweet and so deceive that sentinel at the gate, the palate.

And only to-day I came upon the true hemlock of the Old World, naturalized in a waste place near the city. Of its bitter lees Socrates once drank, and Hannibal. A manual of botany informs me that in ancient times criminals and philosophers were put to death by it. Strange bedfellows in the grave! Yet there have been criminal philosophies, and some philosophical criminals, too. Socrates probably had a "large, loose, immoral mind," exhilarating to the strong spirits, dangerous to the weak. As for Hannibal, his only crime was to have opposed Rome.

Why is it that to hold a poisonous plant in the hand is peculiarly giddying to my mental balance? I have never experienced the desire to jump off a high place which torments some people. A gun in my hand produces no other sensation than a wish to lay it down at once. But the little black seeds of stramonium, the sleek fat capsules of the opium

poppy, and the hemlock that gives painless death, these reveal me to myself, that I stand upon an awful brink. Heaven or hell yawns before me, or else the blinding white light of oblivion.

With this I could snuff life—

Still, it is not with a plant alkaloid that I shall ever terminate a lazy existence. Few of them are kind in their methods. I once rifled the nest of some wild bees and ate their dark-brown honey. It is my belief that they tried to do me in, for I became horribly sick for a short time. I know not whether they had procured their nectar from Phytolacca, the pokeweed, or the mountain aconite. In any case, it is to be wondered how the poison affected the stomachs of the bees. The nest was empty; perhaps the local flora had played a cruel trick upon the house of golden slaves.

August 24.

Where did barn swallows nest before there were any barns? Or—a more burn-

ing question—where will they nest when garages and airplane hangars supplant the old-fashioned barn?

I like a barn, and in particular I like the swallow-haunted barn at the MacGregors'. I like the sound of the horses stamping, of the champing of their long teeth on the hard golden corn; I like the steamy smell of hide and hay and oats, and the whistling of the wind in the crannies, and the stir of the fringe of hay over the door where the generous loft spills over. I like the soft gloom under the eaves, and the rays of sunlight that slip between the boards and reveal the dancing of the motes and atoms. The soft chuckling of sentimental pigeons in the cupola is better than the braggart operatics of a catbird, and in the rough-hewn beams one may see a crafty, irritable colony of paper wasps at work upon their nautilus of mud.

Lying half asleep in those hot hills odorous with the ferment of dying timothy, I watch the barn swallows at their labors, tending the squeaking young in the muddy, grassy nest up under the eaves. The sweet

twitter of the male bird, hurrying to and fro, is his rapture upon the things of home, the life that is intimate, sheltered, and faithful. I see the steel blade of him dart and wheel close to my head. He trusts me, for has he not seen me bring my own mate here, with her fledgling in her arms?

SEPTEMBER

September 2.

Walking along the banks of the old canal that George Washington surveyed, because the elms that line its banks give the only cool shade I can find in the city these days, my eyes are caught by a bright path of emerald stretching away up the winding canal in a curving swale. The duckweed has formed a miniature Sargasso all the way. And true to the name, it is being eaten by a few ducks bobbing about in it, gobbling bits of what they esteem a delicacy.

I have never gazed upon Rafflesia, the largest flower in the world, that stinking, tropic parasite with fleshy blossoms three feet across. But in the duckweed I am at least looking upon the tiniest flowering plants in existence, and I prefer its clean green minutiæ of beauty. Careless passers-by may look on it as merely green scum. But it is not the true scum, the slimy strands of algæ,

ridden with the gaseous bubbles of unclean water, but delightful floating islands of a far higher type of vegetation.

So small are the duckweeds that they consist in nothing but a flat disk of green, about as big as the tip of my little finger, with or without roots, bearing, though most rarely, a primitive and tiny flower. If I were to wade into the canal and bring some of its waters up I might find still smaller members of this family, scarce bigger than a pollen grain. But I am content to admire this filmy and ever-changing ribbon of green from the ancient banks of the canal.

September 13.

There is a handsome wastrel hanging about the fringe of my garden, that I am unwilling to uproot—the teasel. Through the fence my prim "pincushion flowers" look blankly past him. They go by the name of scabiosa, respectable though ugly, and try hard to forget that they belong to the teasel family. Very likely they let garden gossip

have it that the striking stranger beyond the pale is a thistle. Teasel might well pass for thistle, with its tall, coarse stems and prickly leaves beneath the flower head.

It has turned black sheep now, but in the Middle Ages—for it is an Old World plant —teasel had standing, at least among the fullers or cloth workers. They took the heads, with those many stiff bristles, and scraped the cloth with them to raise the nap. Now a machine does this labor, but on the principle which the teasel pointed out to the inventors, who in recognition gave to their device the teasel's name.

Narcissa promises the scabiosas that she will soon remove their obnoxious cousin. Among the strawflowers and statice of a winter bouquet, teasel will be welcome by the fireside through the blossomless months.

September 15.

Narcissa met me at the door, when I came back from the woods.

Pointing to my rough homespun suit stippled from shoulder to trouser cuff with burs, "The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," quoth she.

I laughed, and swore a little, and laughed again, and sat down on the steps to the half-hour task of removing the pests that had stolen a ride. So slow an occupation is bound to engender a little philosophy, and as I threw the burs away it suddenly struck me why it is that weeds are unconquerable. They inherit the earth because they prevail upon others to do their work for them. In the weeds' point of view, my place in Nature was to take a walk through the woods, collect several hundred of their seeds and fruits, transport them a few miles, and throw them carefully on my front lawn where under the best of conditions they would thrive and multiply.

Thereafter I collected the burs in little heaps, sorting the different kinds. There were two dozen big cockle burs and about as many burdocks; besides one or two stramonium burs there were threescore little green agrimonias and large red avens. The

beggar-ticks or Spanish needles were in the lead with nearly one hundred, with ragweed a close second in the contest for the unenviable title of chief nuisance. Under the lens of an unfeeling God of Biology I must have presented merely a fair cross-section of the relative efficiency of the distributing mechanism of the world's weed flora.

September 20.

I found the autumnal sun still hot, when I had walked some miles down the open road, and stopped to wipe my face, the catch of thirst in my throat. But there was shade in the cleft of the green-breasted hill before me, and better, the roof of a spring house. And there I found one of earth's coolest pleasures. In the tiny trickle leading from the little stone cavern was a bed of water mint, and leaning to drink I caught a faint minty flavor in the water itself.

The mints may be known by their square stems and opposite leaves. The flowers are

curiously two-lipped, ever a sign of a highly evolved plant family. The lower lip provides a landing-stage for the insect, and the deep, narrow throat leads him on, and in.

No garden I may ever plant in the span of my time as gardener on earth will be without its patch of mint. That fresh, clean, penetrating odor is an essential element in the garden's bouquet. Catnip, the rankest of the family, makes giddy the staidest tabby, but to me all the mints peculiarly breathe quiet. It makes peace in the mind even to think of them—lavender that our grandmothers loved, and thyme that scents the pages of Theocritus.

September 25.

Grackles are such silly birds that I like them. They appeal to me in very much the same way that a mob of human beings appeals—not an orderly crowd swayed by a leader and a common impulse, but a rabble, encouraging itself by an uproar of talk about

it to go and do great things. The southbound grackles who have been flocking all day in the rainy woods about my house seem perpetually to be on the verge of a great adventure. Suddenly one, as if inspired, will leave his fellows and make off for a distant tree, screaming his new idea, and a detachment of his fellows secedes from the political convention of the main body and follows after him, repeating his catchwords. The staid old conservatives watch them go with satisfaction and make sarcastic remarks about faddy new principles.

But presently it begins to feel a little bleak and chilly in the old tree. Humans and grackles and monkeys all enjoy a sensation of safety in numbers, and the birds flap off to join their pioneering comrades, abjuring all they professed before. In the meantime, however, in the colony that probably calls itself progressive there have already arisen wranglings and bitter schisms, and the malcontents have put their heads together and gabbled themselves into a courage to conspire. There is already, too, a party

who wants to get back to the good old traditions and the faith of its fathers, and soon the old tree near my window is reinhabited.

I believe it must be in the grackle's Bible that the Lord made the earth for him to enjoy—the green things for him to eat and the animals to be his food. Where the grackles pass in Spring young birds of other species are thrown out of their nests and killed, and when in the Autumn they descend, a roaring, ravenous horde, blackening the sky, upon the rice coast of South Carolina they treat the fruit of man's labors as having been specifically designed for their nourishment. How closely this tallies with our own Simian egocentricity I do not venture to say.

And yet withal I love the grackles. I love the somber glints of metallic green and purple in their black plumage, and into their hoarse, cracked, lisping gabble creeps continually some fragment of real melody such as that for which blackbirds are famous. A sweet whistle, showing that the grackle is kin unto the redwing and the bobolink, blows through the multitudinous uproar of the grackle host like a soft Spring wind.

September 27.

"That's all right," the cordial bookseller had said, as I flipped the leaves of the two gorgeous folio-size volumes of tree lore, "just send a check when convenient."

Yet after months of happy oblivion the bill turned up, with a gorgonish "Please Remit" across the bottom, as inevitably as the black sheep brother comes home to roost in melodrama. I went out, and up to the beech woods, there to rumple my hair and add up columns of deadly little figures. There under the shielding boughs and the untroubled heaven above, panic came upon me. Was this worse than folly, this adventure of mine? What sort of a craft was I piloting my precious cargo in, that such a trifling billow as a bookseller's bill should rock it so precariously? What if a tidal wave of sickness or catastrophe came upon us? I flung myself down between the beech roots and stared skyward.

The great gray roots cradled me like the

paws of a moveless monster. Beneath me the sucking roots went down, thrusting toward buried streamlets, laying manifold hold upon inner earth. So unerring that tropism that a root planted upward will grow down, seeking the water, seeking the darkness, the hidden food in the earth's core. Deep, deep below me the great roots thrust, laying sure hold on life.

I went home with more tree lore in my head than ever I learned from the colored plates and pages of my magnificent and unpaid-for volumes.

September 30.

Down river the ducks gabble and stand on their heads, and the redwings come in clouds, chorusing their metallic, liquid "konqueree-ee!" wheeling, and settling upon the wild rice. It looks much like corn growing in water, with its big drooping leaf blades and stately inflorescences. The upper part of the flower spike is female and stands gracefully erect; the lower is male, with

widespread branches. But already the male flowers are withered and the female have set seed. For those kernels the redwings have come in a destroying horde.

Almost, among those water lanes of the wild rice, I can picture the canoes of the Indians who once came with flails to beat the rice into their boats. The gamy and rather smoky taste of it is to the polished white rice as a wild duck to a barnyard fowl. By what delightful chemistry are these autumnal days —the pungency of the marshes and the very quality of the redwing call, edged yet mellow —distilled and stored in wild rice kernels?

OCTOBER

October 1.

When the year is old and the last crickets chirp from frosty meadows and the grackles for a space fill the bushes by the river with the warfare of their talk, the gentians bloom. They make the Tenth Month somehow more precious for their sparse and lovely blossoming, and the cobalt of their corollas is like a bit of October's own intense sky dropped down on earth.

They keep some delicate charm of Spring wildflowers, do the gentians, just as the Indian Summer weather itself has that warm, prescient tenderness of a March day. But March means the birth of the year and comes heralded by the dear, gay blue of the squill and hepatica. The darker, sadder blue of gentians is death's handwriting on the grass.

In open meadows and the wayside ditches I look for the remote and illusive transients. Hereabout are none of those fringed gentians that are like the Bud's long-lashed blue

eyes. But our humbler gentians have an air of mystery about them, for two of them are tightly closed. "Blue bottles" my country neighbors call them. They appear not to open, but to remain eternally in bud, as though they wished never to leave the sheltered childhood of their lives. The other of our gentians lacks the serene blue of the closed or bottle gentians and is only a pale, greenish yellow like the color seen in winter sunsets. Of the three it is the most rare, and so, for no very logical reason, I prize it most. On the score of beauty, though, there cannot be a moment's hesitation, so much fairer are the blue bottle gentians. Thus inconsistent is the human mind. By the same token, though perversely, I love the little crystals of rose quartz in the sands of my brook better than all the wealth of Kimberley.

October 3.

There is a pipe in a glass case in the Museum that I hanker for every time I light my

briar. It is a bit of old Aztec craft, the bowl carved in the likeness of a zinnia flower. The old Mexican Indians who first tended the zinnia and passed it on to the white man's garden knew, then, before me the smoky burning of the last autumn flowers. Theirs, too, the marigold whose pungent leaves crushed between my fingers conjure up old orchards with the apples rotting on the ground in a hum of drunken wasps, gourds with the bloom of frost upon them, and the farewell whistle of the white-throat sparrow. What alien, ancient associations did that potent aroma bring to mind for my old Aztec brother?

October 6.

Five crows on a dead oak tree in the mellow sunshine of October, jesting together with raucous gossip—I heard their sarcastic comments on me as I crossed the stubble of the field below. For the crow has a poor opinion of humanity, I think, and I don't wonder at it. To the contemptible insult of

the scarecrow the farmer adds the injury of an ill-judged bullet. The crow has been outlawed, become the butt of man's ineradicable lust for gunning, all for the theft of a handful of grain. By that same justice, men were hanged, in Merrie England, for the stealing of a sheep. The crow's contribution to the economy of the farm is tremendous. Rats, mice, beetles, weevils, cutworms, and all the crawling host are prey to his bright eye. No, no, my thieving friend the crow, harsh musician, Villon among the birds, is not so black as he is painted.

Catch the autumnal sunlight on his outstretched wing as he teeters on the leafless branch—that sudden glint out of the somber sable is better than a flash of less subtle color. Hear, down the long silence of a still afternoon, his exultant "Caa—caa—caa!" It is one with the lazy warmth, with the silvery beauty of blasted trees, and the smell of sunburnt grass in the clearings. It whets the wistful, nostalgic hunger of the heart, with a magic equal to the far, long whistle of a train passing into distance.

October 10.

On days like these the woods are like the heart of a fire opal. The sumacs, quick to respond to the first urge of Autumn, droop like crimson bannerets; the sun puts gold in the green of the leaves, and over all the haze lies as though drifted here from the dim blue hills up river.

There is a long, suspiring quiet on the woods. I stood to-day under an oak's canopy, with all the rich tapestry of the wood before me, thinking how likely it seemed that antique figures—falconers and ladies and plumed knights—might come riding in a procession of archaic postures across the fabric of that copse before me. But nothing came and nothing sounded save the sudden, cheery, gallant call of a quail.

I whistled back, as nearly in his language as I could.

"Bobwhite!" he answered readily, and "Bobwhite!" I whistled in reply.

So for long, lazy minutes we tossed that

friendly colloquy back and forth, and I had a rare and healing sense of being accepted by the woods as an insider.

"Bobwhite, bobwhite!" he called in unvarying, unfearing cadence, and while the note must still have swelled his feathered throat it was cut short by the sharp thunder of a shot.

My happy content was brought as abruptly to the ground, and cold anger took its place. I strode through the crackling copse to search out the huntsman, and came face to face with him on the other side of it.

A broad figure with a gun in one hand, in baggy corduroys, stood holding by the feet my dead little friend, now no more than a limp bunch of ruffled feathers with a dangling head, regarding it with a certain puzzled uncertainty in his attitude. He looked up, as I crashed through the bushes—a plump, blank, amiable face with light blue eyes that stood out, slightly like a crab's.

I smiled a brief greeting.

"Got him, didn't you?" I said, without expression.

He nodded, and dropped the little bob-

white in an otherwise empty sack slung at his back.

I got out my pipe and lighted it.

"Going my way?" I inquired pleasantly, with a nod over my shoulder.

He nodded again.

"I'll go along with you," he said in a fat, amiable voice.

In silence we went together through the copse. When we struck the little path beyond, I said:

"Did you ever try talking to a bob-white? Great fun. Friendly little beggars. I'd been holding a conversation with that fellow for five minutes—before you got him."

"So?" he said, with round, empty eyes. There was something about him as bland as tapioca.

"You know what a fierce winter they had this year up East?" I remarked. "Worst since '89, I believe it was. It killed the birds by thousands, so they say. The deep snow buried their food, you see. The State of Massachusetts appropriated money to buy grain, and supplied it to rural mail carriers and other qualified people to scatter on their

routes for the birds. The ground birds, like the quail, were particularly hard hit. Must have seemed a godsend—a miracle—that grain."

We tramped a while without words.

"I call that sporting," I said, "saving those little bird lives."

The hunter nodded. Ahead, up the hill, the roof of the Acorn glimmered in the noon sun through the leaves.

"That's where I live," I said. "Won't you come up for a bit? I fancy I smell mushrooms sizzling—I brought a batch home this morning. That's all I care to hunt in these woods. Come along up, sir, do! My wife would make you very welcome."

"No, thanks. I don't believe I will, sir," said the fattish man reflectively. With his customary null expression he pulled the bag around from his back, and drew out the bird.

"Want this? I don't."

"Bury it," I said briefly, and turned up the hill. Over my shoulder I called back: "Come around some day and go mushrooming with me."

He made a vague gesture of farewell salute and passed on under the leaves, a broad, blank back.

October 15.

These are the days to go up river, along the steep, rocky banks where the soil is rich, to gather the wild pawpaws. I do not myself much like their taste—it is an acquired one at best—but I enjoy the thrill of the quest itself.

There is something startling about the mere presence of the pawpaw in this climate, so completely, so obviously is it a tropic fruit—heavy and fleshy and curiously shaped. Even the leaves have a tropical appearance and a thick unpleasant odor, and the little dark-red flowers with a fragrance like crushed strawberries are even more characteristic of the torrid zones. Not that our pawpaws grow in the tropics; they are merely a northern representative of the great Annona family of the far hot countries.

Nobody has selected or bred or improved

the pawpaw, and so it is but natural that some are good, some bad, and many but indifferent. Like most tropical fruits, the pawpaw is custardy, without the sprightly acidulous flavor of an orange or apple. It is "heavier" than most of our northern fruits, nutritious rather than refreshing. And when I wander too far in the Autumn woods, and dinner is a regrettably long tramp away, I reflect gratefully on that, as I sit on a log and make my meal of a fortunately found pawpaw. I think, too, of the red men, the vanished race that once paddled my quiet river and roamed the woods upon the same quest that brought me out to-day.

Pocahontas' body, lovely as a poplar, sweet as a red haw in November or a pawpaw in May, did she wonder? does she remember? . . . in the dust, in the cool tombs?

October 20.

Narcissa was off with the Bud to fetch milk from Mr. MacGregor's, and I was

alone in the Acorn, bent frowning over the papers on my desk, trying to shut out awareness of the blue-and-gold afternoon outside, that was passing on slow, noiseless feet, turning a wistful, beckoning face in at my window. I had got some sort of a final paragraph down in my article, and pushed back my chair when a step sounded on the doorstone.

"Hello!" I called cheerily, to the expected entrance of Narcissa.

Nobody came. I went to the door and there stood the large, loose figure in old corduroys, meeting my startled gaze with empty face.

"Hello," he announced, "I've come to go mushrooming."

I laughed shamelessly, because it seemed Nonsense herself—the blessed goddess!—had taken on this apparition on my doorstep.

"Good enough," I said, sobering. "I'm your man."

I got a basket and he plodded after me as I swung down the path. On the grassy floor of a little chink in the ravine we found a sprinkling of *Agaricus campestris*.

"Here you are, Mr. Gunner," I said. "This kind is the old, safe stand-by. Isn't it extraordinary that people let themselves get poisoned by mushrooms? People who wouldn't think of taking doses from a medicine bottle without looking at the label will apparently trust any old mushroom implicitly."

My companion knelt heavily and gathered the Agaricus with pudgy fingers.

"What kind are bad?" he asked like a school child.

"Some of the most esthetically attractive, especially the Amanitas. For one of those there is no antidote. Its poison, I understand, enters the system and destroys the corpuscles of the blood. Those old experts, the Borgias and Medicis, all knew a thing or two about administering the Amanita in the soup at their dinner parties."

"You don't say!" said the fat man, and appeared to ruminate. "Well, well!" he added, after a long minute, and shook his head heavily.

We found a half a dozen more Agaricus

near the flat rocks and some puffballs in the damp woods. On the way home I said:

"By the way, sir, I don't know your name." I told him mine and asked what his was.

"Well," he said affably, "I'm Mr. Gunner."

"No, seriously," I laughed.

He rounded his pale-blue eyes. "That's my name—isn't it a good name?"

Coincidence crops up anywhere in this matter-of-fact, amazing world, I admitted to myself.

"Well, Mr. Gunner," I said, as we came under the big tulip tree, "you're coming up to-day, aren't you?"

He shook his head, and I urged him.

"No," he explained ponderously. "You ask me for another time. Then I'll have a reason to come back here."

I laughed and went on alone up to the Acorn, hungry to see if Narcissa was back from the milk expedition.

Narcissa doesn't believe in the Gunner man. She declares he was a leprechaun in disguise, or that I dreamed him. But I have

assured her he was far too solid flesh for an apparition. Certainly I did not dream of him that night after the mushroom hunt, but of the mushrooms themselves, of great, bulbous, argent caps that rose before my very eyes and swelled to terrible heights that blotted out the moon.

October 25.

When the last pewee has called in the woods and is still, and only the crow's harsh caw echoes in the frosty air, Narcissa and I look for beechdrops, strangest flowers of Autumn. Up along the steep declivities of the gorge where the river breaks through the ring of hills—gorgeous now in Autumn dress—we search out the stately beeches with their smooth, gray boles and crisping old-gold leaves. Somewhere there, under the leaves, in the black, moldy earth, are growing the beechdrops.

They would seem like tiny sylphs of the mold, rising so delicately and shyly through the fallen leaves, but for their ghostlike qual-

ity. Rather are they like phantoms of flowers, like the withered stubble of last year's harvest, but in their branches bloom tiny yellowish blossoms.

Epifagus, their Latin name, has a ghoulish sound, for it means beecheater. And they do indeed batten upon the beech roots, but they cannot do the giant serious harm.

The ghost pipes, with stem and twisted flowers like tiny, tobacco pipes, so common in our moist woods and thickets, are, like their relatives the beechdrops, parasites on roots of other plants, and I have noticed that the broom rape, which ravages the broom bushes of the Old World, has of late made its unwelcome appearance here, on clover.

Strangest of all the family is the rare squawroot, looking like a yellow-pine cone. Never shall I forget the first time I saw it—in that mysterious dusk of a deep, pine wood with a swift mountain night drawing down. Suddenly a whole grove of the squawroot underfoot confronted my startled gaze. A ghostly army of gnomes had arisen from the rotting leaf mold, had sprung up, hostile, supernatural, around my heavy mortal foot.

I plucked one plant from the earth, and it revenged itself by leaving a strange carrion smell upon my fingers, which the cold water of a mountain brook would not cleanse away.

But I do not often find the squawroot here, and, after all, the beechdrops are lovelier. When at last Narcissa and I come suddenly upon a clump of them, we find ourselves standing silent awhile before those wraith-like plants lifting their marcescent heads in the month of dying flowers.

NOVEMBER

November 1.

There is a city in Cathay, they tell me, known as Chrysanthemum City. It took this name upon the death of T'ao who made his town renowned throughout the empire for the beauty of his chrysanthemums. It may be added of the great breeder that he was also a poet and a genial tippler, for it is written in defense of chrysanthemums—

Yet say not that they bloom to no purpose,
For did they not inspire T'ao
To poetry and conviviality?

It is now upwards of a thousand years since the Mikado Uda held the first great chrysanthemum show, and since his time the Japanese have never missed one year a great display of the flower that is now become the emblem of the royal family. And, as it chances, it is just a century since John Damper Parks, the explorer and botanist, brought the first great shipment of chrysanthemums to Europe.

I went to the city to-day to see a great chrysanthemum display under glass, and another, which was to me more delightful, of hardy singles grown out-of-doors. Truly it is said of this flower that it is the most variable in all the world. And the wonderworks of cunning breeders of the Orient is finding its place at last in America. We are surpassing the old-fashioned chrysanthemum which was by an approved convention nothing but a perfect sphere of yellow or white, monotonous as balls. In the recent showings, what magic shapes are seen—fantastic snowdrifts, cones like Fujiyama, shapes like sea anemones, great tousled heads, and in the single flowers, shades of pastel unmatched.

November 4.

In schools of yesterday we were all brought up to believe that it is frost that turns the leaves from green to the orange of the maple and the crimson of the persimmon. But Science, which goes through the world unkindly upsetting old beliefs, revers-

ing even its own decisions, appears to be skeptical about the handiwork of frost in the yearly transformation. All the flaming reds and the clear, golden yellows that I see these days are reduced to a chemical reaction and dubbed with names like xanthocyanin and erythrocyanin. Worse, they are declared nothing but the symbols of the leaf's senescence, a signal of approaching death. As the food materials of the leaf are chemically prepared for storage in the stems, there take place those reactions that show themselves in the bright panoply of autumn woods.

But no names can change the glory of the colors themselves. The purple-red raspberry and blueberry leaves are still a running fire upon the hills, leaping here and there to the taller tongues of flame where a sumac burns. The tulip tree is limpid gold, the beech a dull old gold, the ashes are incredible pastel shades of mauve and lilac. With a little practice I have learned to name a tree by its colors, from a distance too great to allow me to see the shape of its leaves. Only the maples defy me, inconsistently vary-

ing from bough to bough in hues from clear gold, through orange, to deep scarlet.

November 7.

In these days when the tang of cold is in the air, every red and gray squirrel is hopping friskily about laying in a winter supply of acorns. It certainly takes a squirrel to appreciate their flavor. I have read about our Indians, and Chinese and others who live largely on the "sweet, starchy endosperm" of acorns, but I know not how to explain their tastes except upon the grounds of race. Tales of starving armies reduced to eating acorns strike me as more likely. If I were so low in body that I could not taste, I might learn to like acorns. Though I have searched my woods and sampled many kinds, and find the white oak tribe a trifle less unbearable, I have never encountered an acorn that was not as bitter as a green persimmon.

There are two great tribes of the genus Quercus, the red and black oaks, and the white and chestnut oaks, and between the

clans it is difficult at first to distinguish. But note, if the leaves are on the trees, whether the veins run out beyond the margin like a little needle point, as they do in the red oak series; if the tree be one of the white oak group, the margins are not prickly. It is a little harder to be certain of the acorns, but the red oaks mature in two years and the white in one—a long experiment, I admit. A more timesaving method is to break open the acorn shell and look at its inside lining. In the red oak series it is slightly downy, in the tribe of the white oaks quite smooth.

The Bud, paternally guided, is making a collection of acorns, each with its different cup, some shallow like saucers, some deep like goblets, some smooth and polished and thin, some big and prickly almost like a bur. The cup of an acorn is, by origin, really a bur, a modified form of the chestnut bur or the beechnut husk.

In the warm, sweet days of Indian Summer the acorn often gets mixed about the seasons. The Bud and I have found scores of them sending up, thus unseasonably, their sprouts. A countryman we met a-walking,

who looked as old as the oaks, told us that meant we shall have a mild winter. But plants, however miraculous, are just machines that respond to influences quite blindly. If the weather is now warm and mild and damp, as it is in Spring, the acorns begin to sprout, though their mistake will probably cost them their lives. We brought one of these sprouting acorns into the house and put it in a pot. Next Spring we may be able to set out a sturdy, little seedling that will live to shelter the Bud's great-great-grandchildren.

November 12.

When the chill wind of November goes roaring its song through the trees, it brings down the glory of the woods with a hand as ruthless as that of a despoiling enemy tearing the battle flags from a hall of honor. Down flutter orange maple and scarlet persimmon and golden tulip-tree leaves, flung into the ditches or lifted high and sent scurrying in hordes for no one knows how far. In the leaves that have drifted

against the blue railing on the terrace I looked to see what sorts they were that made up this pile of the slain. There were some that grow nowhere hereabouts—come (who can tell?) from some other state. A few steady days of the west wind traveling at forty miles an hour, such as for a week we have had, could easily have transported leaves a hundred miles.

Narcissa grieves to hear the vandal wind. Yet even on a still day, on a tranquil, golden, Autumn afternoon, the leaves come twirling to earth in a shining rain. Plainly it is not through accident that leaves fall from the trees. Even in the tropics without a winter, I have seen the trees shedding their foliage, though they do it bough by bough. So it is neither wind nor cold that makes leaves fall, nor even senescence, but some deliberate force.

I have been sectioning the bases of some leafstalks and looking at them under my microscope. And there I note the growth of a layer of new cells just where the break between the twig and leaf occurs. Knife-like, there has been deliberately inserted this

layer of abscission cells which cohere so loosely that the leaf is at last cut adrift.

Yet for the leaf itself the story is not all over. It must still go through a process of decay. And what an ugly word is decay for the beauty of that mutation! The transformation of leaves into mold is one of Nature's grandest miracles, albeit on a tiny scale.

Even in death in the city streets a leaf may be very beautiful. If it fall upon the pavements and the Autumn rains soak it, the soft parts will be leached away and only the silvery skeleton of its vein system will be left, a tracery more delicate than any arabesque in carved marble. Even the brown stain left on the cement by the silicic acid has a haunting beauty, as though the Summer would impress some memory of its glory on the streets of Time.

November 18.

"Frost before morning," read the weather predictions, and, as I drop to sleep, my mind

pictures the out-of-doors, the clear, still night. It will be a night of brilliant stars and empty, cloudless skies, with nothing between Earth and the chill of outer space where, infinitely distant, the worlds flash their cold beacon lights.

Frost before morning—and the numb worm burrows deeper under the roots in the garden; he feels it coming, as the rabbit feels it, springing through the leafless hedges, as the floors of the country cabins foretell it in ghostly creaking and snappings. The heavy sap of trees must reach the roots soon or be congealed—and what Celestial Plumber shall repair those works if the pipes freeze?

The last leaves of the season, those close to the ground, break out to-night in a cold perspiration before morning comes. And when the sun does rise and melts the frost, it leaves a trail of blackened foliage where it passes. When I get up in the early morning I find the windowpane glazed over with a magic growth. A forest, a dense fernery, a submarine beauty of corals and sponges and polyps, a strange moon-growth of fungi

sprung up over night—what magician wrought this beauty of ice, of death?

The Bud runs to the window to exclaim over the frost crystals, to scrawl his mark in them, to taste on his finger their biting kiss, as they soon must melt before the kiss of sunlight. And when we go out-of-doors, the Bud and I, we see how far the frost has extended its power, as a faint, moldy film on the path to the spring, as a thin tracery on twigs and stalks. In our dead garden he shows me how it has pushed up gleaming, acicular crystals through the old, red clay, making a tiny forest of rose quartz.

November 21.

I have never got up early enough, or gone to bed so late, that I could catch a 'possum unaware. But somebody, and it is no one human, eats the bitter, little persimmons on the young tree down the wood lane and strews the flat, black seeds along the path.

From the time that the persimmons first turn golden till they drop like a blob of

orange custard to the ground, I try them, and I have never found one that was not bitter as wormwood. True, I have tasted good persimmons from other trees, but this only goes to show that our native species, unlike the *kaki* of Japan, has been neglected by man and its good varieties never propagated.

I should like to eat persimmons when the frost has kissed them and the late autumn sun warmed them again. It would give me a fine, racy, primitive feeling, better surely than living on roots or locusts. But often as I try it, and choke and pucker my lips, I think all the better of the foods man has tamed.

It wasn't an opossum I saw, when to-day I turned down the lane in view of the persimmon tree, but there was some one else standing under the little tree, looking reflectively up at the pale orange fruits. It was my friend of the dingy corduroys, Mr. Gunner.

"These good to eat?" he inquired as I came up, as though continuing a conversation broken off not more than five minutes ago.

"Sometimes," I answered cautiously.

"They can pucker your mouth like the deuce if they're not ripe."

He gave his heavy, thoughtful nod. "I'd figured on eating some," he admitted. "But I guess I won't."

"Hungry, are you?" I laughed. "Then you've got to come along up to my place. It's three times and in, this time. I won't let you get away."

Narcissa gave him that welcome of hers that would make a polar bear feel at home in the tropics, and he sat for an hour in the big wing chair before the ruddy hearth, eating caramel cake and gazing vacantly about the Acorn's living room. But for all his apathy and gross bulk there was a silent warmth of good feeling and gratitude emanating from him. The Bud, with a child's unerring sense, must have felt it, for he came clambering up in the broad, paunchy lap and sat there contentedly, playing with the elk's tooth on the big man's watch chain. Mr. Gunner paid him little attention, but to spread knees in a comfortable pocket for him and proffer a fat Ingersoll for his destructive entertainment—and there is no other

treatment that so soon conquers the outposts of a small child's good-will.

When he had gone, and Narcissa, with a bright invitation to return, had closed the door after him, she stood a moment, her back to the door, facing me, glowing.

"I *like* him!" she said warmly. "He is a poor old sweet thing. I want him to come often."

She is always right about people. And I like him myself. I have even forgiven him for the quail.

November 23.

If flowers could make music they would be more marvelous than birds, but except for the sighing of wind in the trees there is little music in the world of plants. But there is one sound that is music to those who have ears to hear it—the rattle of the Autumn's crop of seeds in the dried pods.

As the wind goes whistling shrilly through the grasses, it tosses the year's harvest of flowers and weeds without pity for their brit-

tle, whitening skeletons, and as it goes it sets to dancing a strange dance of death the millions of tiny beans and capsules that contain the seeds of life. There are seeds so minute that they are no larger than grains of pollen dust, and only some insect with ears attuned to the highest notes could hear the sound they make, but the vibration of the poisonous seeds of that back-yard weed, stramonium, clicking in their big, sear burs, of the beans of the honey locust in their strange, flat pods or of the little, black seeds of the rattle-box, is a sound dear to those who have a moment, in the quiet country places, to listen for it.

Something ghostly is this music if you think of Autumn sadly, as though in the midst of life we are in death, but jolly like the crackle of fallen leaves or the fine hiss of the first falling snow, if you face the coming of Winter as one who loves the year's mutation.

And there are sounds that are overtones to the rattle of seeds in their pods, sounds invariably associated with this very music—the creak-creaking of great boughs strained in the wind, and the faint, dry "tseep" of

little, gray and white Winter birds which perch, swinging in the wind, on the dry weed stalks, hunting in the seed pods for their scanty fare.

November 24.

Along the brook to-day, among the alders and swamp maples, I found a little witch-hazel tree standing leafless in the cold, and plainly I could see a sly wren hopping about among its bare limbs. But the witch-hazel was in its glory now, last of all wild things to bloom. Its flowers come so late, in fact, that fireside folk who give up their rambles at the first touch of Winter never see them at all.

Standing before the little tree, while somewhere a pewee called drearily, I was strangely reminded of Spring. These flowers have a haunting reminiscence of March days, for which I cannot account unless it be that on the bare wood the four slender golden petals have much the appearance of Forsythia.

But about the little witch-hazel tree hung

a ghostly air. It had the lonesome look I would expect of the last man on earth. Forsythia sounds the reveille of the year. Witch-hazel is its dirge. Strangely, too, do its fruits ripen in the early Summer of the next season, at the very moment when other flowers are in full bloom.

I shall come back to find, in the furry cups that will follow to-day's yellow flowers, the sleek, black, shining seeds.

November 30.

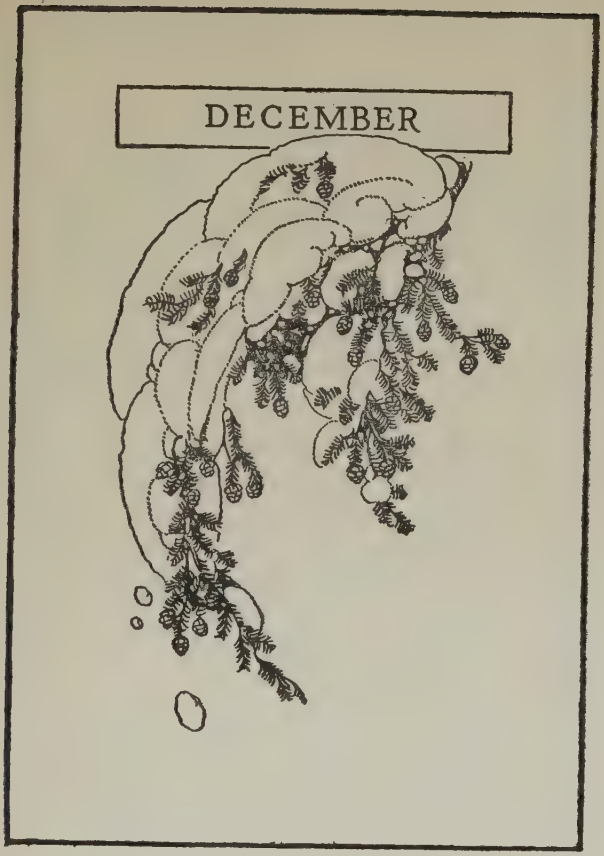
When the numb, old earth rolls along under angry skies the color of dark wool and ink, and a cruel wind breaks the limbs of the dead chestnut trees without a moment's pity for their moans, I look up in the rain-hung sky and see the flying legions of the geese. They say that the Canada goose cries "honk," but it sounds to me more like "woonk-woonk," that call that the leader utters. Does it have to those warm-blooded, wind-tossed birds, alone in a limitless ocean of sky, the comforting, commanding sound

of a captain, urging on a weary column?

We are now under the zodiacal symbol of Sagittarius, the archer. But if I were making a new zodiac that would fit the life of an aboriginal twentieth-century dweller on the banks of the Potomac, I should call the eleventh month of the year by the name and symbol of Branta, the wild goose.

A silly bird, the common, barnyard goose, who has done nothing to his credit since he saved Rome. I wonder, as his untamed cousins go screaming through the skies, wind-whipped, acold, driven by hunger and an arctic fear, if that haunting cry of the free and strong-winged ever stirs for a moment some ancient racial memory in the comfortable, barnyard fellow? His is a soft life indeed, with all the sweet, yellow corn he can eat and a submissive flattering court of fat, little concubines about him. And then, on a great feast day his plump, egotistical neck will be wrung and he will lie in state, roasted, with chestnuts stuffed up in his belly and sprigs of parsley in a ring around him like trees in a city park, and the warm grease trickling from his sleek sides. A better fate,

if one must die, thinks he, than growing so old that one can no longer breast the storm and hold the apex of the flying wedge; happier this than to be brought bleeding to earth by the swift, terrible missile of a hidden hunter in the reeds. Better your ease in an inn than the frozen salt grass for a resting place, and a pitiless journey of two thousand miles with no better fare than the pickings of wild rice left by the grackles and the redwings. No, I think the prisoned rarely envy the free, nor the free the prisoned. "Woonk-woonk," I hear them cry, and they are gone behind the gaunt arms of the trees atop the hill. The snows will follow soon.


DECEMBER

December 1.

In the season when the gray squirrel dons his heavy fur, the trees, too, are actively getting ready for Winter. On a stroll through the woods I find a dozen signs of it. The most important are not visible—the withdrawal of the food stores from the leaves or the fall of sap in the stems, that silent waterfall that would make a Niagara if all the descending sap could be brought into one mighty river. But these are secrets of the trees' alchemy. What I see in my woods is the transformation of the twigs and their winter buds, whereby the tree piles on more blankets over the tenderest, sleeping parts.

I know trees by their leaves, but now is the time I try my woodsmanship by telling them apart in Winter state. The very size and shape of the twig means much—the beech's slim and branching, the hickory's thick and curved. Or the color of the outer

bark or the inner, or some characteristic taste like the bitter-almond flavor of the willow—these mean much. And there are the big lunar leaf scars of the ash, and the tiny lenticels or breathing pores that fleck the cherry's twigs.

But it is the winter buds that give to every twig its characteristic difference—the great, sticky, shiny buds of the poplar, and the big dull-yellow buds of the hickory. Elm and maple buds are red already and look as if they were about to burst into bloom. But lilac buds are still as slim and pale as a little new moon, and oak buds are too small for notice—slow in all things are the oaks, but exceeding sure. And the magnolia, as if—soft, tropic thing—it dreaded death from cold, is clothed in an overcoat of dense golden fur.

December 4.

When all the flowers have vanished from wood and field and only their dun wisps stand stark, prey of the devouring hordes of little,

black fungi that speckle their dead forms, all beauty is not gone from the earth. For this is the season when the rambler among thickets where numb beetles tumble and brown wrens hop silently may discover and pick the pods of the wild yam.

Light as a snowflake now, dry as cork, the wild yam, trailing by brook, over alder and elder and little red birch, is dead, but how beautiful in death! Still by the final writhing of its vine stem it strikes a fantastic, defiant attitude; it shows with what a regal gesture it had of late flung open a silver purse and scattered its seeds of life to a dying world.

In all the woods no seed pod is half as beautiful as this, with its elegant triangular form, its thin, silvery walls, and its hyaline partitions that part the vessel in three. The one spray of these silver pods that Narcissa has put across our chimney piece would throw the soul of a Japanese artist into ecstasy over its living asymmetry, its neutral, etched lines, its subdued high lights.

I never find the wild yam without a quickening of wonder at this kin of a great tropi-

cal family strayed to our northern midst. Gathering it from the drear woods, I think of sunny isles of the Pacific, where brown-skinned people squat and munch the tubers of their native yams. Not that theirs have the least to do with what in the Southern States we call a yam, which is merely a sugary sweet potato. The true yam is a rare vegetable indeed in America, and seldom have I tasted its strange flesh, crisp as a cucumber and like a white potato but richer and sweeter. This is the yam of history and legend, which Polynesians carried from island to island in frail proas long ago.

December 7.

In the pages of his scholarly book I pursued the adventures of an ornithologist in the Canary Islands, following him as he sighted and shot at one of the rarest little birds in the world, until, "To my intense joy," he remarked, in unmistakable Caslon, "it fell stone dead."

So, very nearly, did I. Science, of course, is ruthless, but it is not wanton. I cannot believe that the gun is the instrument with which to advance knowledge. I have less sympathy with that ornithologist than with the frankly blood-lusty sportsmen that are out these days for the ducks down the river, for it is now open season.

These days of pale sunshine, when vague mists rise from the chilled earth early and late, are open season to me in quite another way. It is open season for gathering nuts, for the sweet reek of burning leaves, for the pert chickadees and well-tailored Juncos hopping about among the crumbs near my door, for tramping cross-country till hunger calls a halt, to cook a chop over a fire of apple wood. There is no wood in the world will burn so freely and steadily as a dead apple bough, and an old apple tree is to be come at in the unlikeliest places, remnant of some forgotten homestead, or sprung up by chance in the woods where years ago some country boy tossed away a seedy core.

December 10.

Coming home from a long tramp, with the burden of worries that I had gone forth to cast away from me still on my shoulders, I walked across the meadow beyond Chinquapin station with brooding eyes on the ground. As the long shadows of the cedars fell upon me I lifted my eyes, and there, an apparition as abrupt and irrelative as the Cheshire Cat, stood Mr. Gunner.

"Hello," he said affably, and fell into step beside me.

The early twilight of the Winter day was chill and gray about us. A like touch was on my spirits, and I found myself inarticulate, hunting vainly for pleasant chat.

"Blue?" queried the fat man unexpectedly.

I think I started.

"Too bad," he said, without too much sympathy. "Worried?"

"I suppose every man has his worries," I said, laughing a little.

"Yep," he said with a brief sigh. "I got mine."

I noticed how frayed the cuff of his corduroy coat, how dingy his ridiculous, podgy cap, and how gray the fringe of hair below it. I knew something like shame, feeling the youth and strength running warm in me as I strode briskly along in the nipping air.

He trotted a little to keep up with me.

"You're a city man, aren't you?" I remarked.

"Yep. But I don't like it."

"Nor I. Thank God I got out of it! And pray God I can stay out."

We reached the Acorn's welcoming warmth, and Narcissa insisted that Gunner stay to dinner. There was a baked ham and sweet potatoes and Narcissa's inimitable chestnut pudding. Mr. Gunner ate vastly, with a happy quiet.

"I don't often get food like this," he admitted, by way of apology.

When he had said good-by to us, he lingered a moment on the threshold, looking up

at the cold stars glittering through naked tree tops.

"You're going to be cold going home," Narcissa sympathized. "You'll be glad to get there, I know."

He shook his bald head characteristically.

" 'Tisn't much of a home," he said, put on his cap, and walked forth heavily into the night.

Narcissa turned into the warm, bright room, where the Bud's pink poodle and one little shoe lay untidily on the floor, and the glasses emptied of gooseberry wine shone ruddy on the little table.

"I'll bet it isn't," she reflected unhappily. "Don't you know those ghastly, lonely rooms looking down on two ash cans and an alley cat? See here!" She turned quickly and caught me by the lapels. "Let's have the old duck for Christmas!"

"If we ever find him again," I said.

I hope we do. There are few folk I would be glad to bid to the happy, holy feast of our Christmas. Extraordinarily, that ponderous commonplace hulk is one.

December 12.

Heavy and white and beautiful, the first flakes of the year have drifted down, twirling slowly to earth at first in twos and threes, and now falling in an unending veil beyond my window. They covered first the frozen grasses and the garden path, and now in little swirls and eddies they heap about our door, stealthily walling in our little besieged party.

Going out to get an armful of wood, I could see with my naked eye the definite form of the big flakes that fell on my coat sleeve. But only my microscope reveals their intricate, fragile beauties. There are forms like stars, others like double stars, and triple, shapes more fairylike than the finest lace, and disks of exquisite geometric pattern.

Unless they have been broken the crystals are always absolutely symmetrical and based on a perfectly balanced geometrical plan. The ground plan of every snow crystal is on the basis of six, six or its multiples. The

points are charged with minute quantities of electrical energy, and the drops of moisture in the air being oppositely charged, the moisture drops are electrically drawn to the tips of the crystal, and thus it grows. Theoretically, there is no limit to the size snowflakes may attain. Moreover, they have, like something living, the ability to repair a wound. When a crystal is broken or partly melted, it can, if the temperature and moisture conditions are right, repair the break, though the microscope generally reveals the seam.

December 19.

What would the country Christmas stocking be without its treasure-trove of nuts? The summer sun ripened the harvest of the trees and now the nuts come thudding down to the forest floor. Boys and girls go to the woods to gather them; squirrels frisk away with their fat cheek pouches full.

The market places are running over with

them, each in its sleek husk that conceals the rich meat. Here are Italian chestnuts, which may really have come from California, ready for roasting, for stuffing the Christmas goose, for whipping to a delectable pudding. Poor folk in Europe, I've been told, buy them piping hot on the street and put them in their pockets to warm their hands on, not eating them until they are cold. Our native chestnuts are all gone now, but in the market, as on the forest floor, I have found tiny, sweet chinquapins, as good or better than the big chestnuts.

Almonds for the Christmas cookies are here, brought from Syria perhaps, or from the Golden State. Those who keep Christmas with Old World traditions gild their almonds, or coat the kernels with sweet chocolate. A big, jolly English walnut, pulled out of the Bud's stocking, will just comfortably fit the little hand that turns with Midas magic such a gift to treasure. And the tougher but far tastier American walnuts are gathered by country folk these days for sale. It takes a hammer to break them, but how rich they are, and how elegantly chambered

are the twisting segments within, like some Nautilus of the land! Long live the season, then, when hospitable folk pass round the cake, the wine, the apples, and the nuts!

December 20.

In my city the open market, in the week before Christmas, turns into a pungent forest of Christmas trees. Rank upon rank they send forth their odors of rosin and tannin and turpentine, of the North woods and the South. I threaded my way through them looking for a balsam. Everywhere the darky vendors flashed white teeth at me and shook their heads.

"No, sah, we ain't got no Boston trees."

There was, however, an army of little spruces come from Maine, smelling of wintry woods near the sea. And for a moment my eye was held by a marvelous Western spruce with drooping cones as long as bananas. But it was a balsam Narcissa charged me to bring home.

A Tennessee neighbor of my childhood would have nothing but a cedar to bear her tinsel and glittering balls, and I have met natives of the Hundred, in the woods, cutting the branchy Virginia pine, good for little else, for their festival. Balsam alone, Narcissa insists, is the true Christmas tree to her. I daresay if one had danced around a palm on the Christmas Eves of one's infancy, it would seem the one and only tree fit for the yearly radiant miracle.

But at last, from one ancient, grimy vendor with a beard like Spanish moss, I got my balsam, a brave, straight, little soldier of a tree, and bore it home in triumph.

Descending from the trolley at Chinquapin I all but collided with Mr. Gunner.

"Well met!" I cried. "I've been hoping you'd turn up."

My trolley rattled off, and at the same moment another, city-bound, that the first had obscured, rushed into the little station and halted at Gunner's wave.

"Got to get in town," he cried apologetically to me, hastening to the platform where the conductor waited.

I caught his shoulder as he mounted the step.

"Look here! My wife wants you to come out for Christmas. So do I. So does the baby. Come Christmas Eve. Will you?"

His face lighted for the first time in our acquaintance, and he shouted, "You bet!" as he swung up, and the car swept on, carrying him off.

I don't feel as though I had done the boy scout's one good deed. I just feel glad that the old coot will be with us on Christmas.

December 21.

I wonder who it was that empowered mistletoe to give its gay benediction to lovers? I have no idea of the origin of that tradition, but other legends cluster around the little gray-green branches as plentifully as the pearly berries.

Balder, the Sun God, was slain, according to the old Norse myth, by an arrow shot from a bow of mistletoe. It must have been

a hefty piece of mistletoe that made a bow big enough to kill a god. Still, I would rather believe that tale than the legend of "The Mistletoe Bough." That doleful ballad about a playful bride who hid in a chest, the lock of which snapped after her, so that she was not found until she was a crumbling skeleton, induced a melancholy, in my childhood, that lingers yet.

The mistletoe, when it embraced the pine, was sacred to the Druids. It is certainly not sacred to the foresters of to-day, for its parasitism is a real menace to the trees in certain of our wooded regions. Yet there clings still some old holiness about those misty branches, and I shall hang one in a place of honor, this Christmas time, and tuck a sprig, unknown to her, in Narcissa's hair.

December 22.

On Christmas Eve, when candles are lit, the candle in my window shall be bayberry. The fragrance of all the holy evenings behind me, and joy, I think, of others I never

knew, are compact in that spicy spire. I choose to think that the bayberry sparkles more brightly than other candles. Sunlight and moonlight and even a good sixty-watt bulb have their appropriate hours, but on Christmas Eve, "the candle for me, tiny, mortal, warm, and brave, a golden lily on a silver stem."

The candlemaker's guild is no more, alas! I regret the days when, just before Christmas, a fellow from the guild came around to your house and made candles to your order, in a big, bubbly kettle in the kitchen, where the smell of fruit cake and plum pudding hung in the rafters. But the bayberry plant, at least, still flourishes. Still its gray berries, with a silvery bloom upon them, hang now beneath the dark, waxy leaves, and still a few lovers of the old-fashioned Christmas go to gather a sprig to twine with the mistletoe hung over the lintel.

December 26.

I give up any attempt to record on a flat,

white page the brief, bright miracle that was Christmas. Though it is past, the little house is still gay with green wreaths and holly, with the bedecked little balsam scenting the fire-warmed rooms. And still I can see, and shall always see, the light shining on Narcissa's face as she set the window candle burning and in the wide, expectant eyes of the Bud where he stood, trailing the ritualistic stocking.

Mr. Gunner came, a celebrant that despite his bulk fitted in perfectly to the festival. The offering he brought Narcissa moved her, after his departure, to tears and mirth. Up the path he stumped that starry evening, carrying a box as long as a coffin, which proved to contain twelve American Beauty roses, so heavily perfect as to appear synthetic.

"The darling, dumb old brute!" wailed Narcissa, weeping over them when he had gone. "There's nothing stupider than American Beauties, and nothing costlier. Imagine the lunches he must have gone without!"

"Nothing better for that figure of his," I

assured her. "Go ahead and enjoy your roses, my dear."

But I can't help regarding with ironic eyes the gorgeous, stiff creatures on my desk, where I sit adding up bills and comparing the total with the ghastly inequality of my bank balance.

JANUARY

January 3.

When the wintry night wind rattles our windows and seems in gusts to slap the side of the house, I hear little, high-pitched voices, and tiny clawed feet scurrying up and down lost, lonely passages, followed by a minute avalanche of plaster within the dark walls. It is the field mice, hunting for a warm bed, perhaps unable to sleep for the cold wuthering of the wind.

There are sleek, sly, dirty little house mice, of course, the sort that raid the pantry at midnight, but these generally live the year round in the house and keep as quiet as may be, for well they know the soundless, stalking danger of Grimalkin, and the cruel, swift snap of the trap. Not so the little field mice, driven to human shelter by the icy air of January. These little wildings are less sophisticated, and make known their presence by squeakings and excited scurryings,

though about showing themselves they are as shy or shyer than the house mice.

Upon my heart I welcome the little field mouse with his clean furry coat, and his bright eyes! He is welcome to a few tidbits, though for food he does not depend wholly on the pantry. He burrows in the wood basket by the hearth, looking for beetles hibernating under the bark, and he raids the rafters for any numb wasps that may have hidden there last summer and started a colony.

January 6.

I am sorry for the steam-heated folk who have never to gather faggots. "Five, six—pick up sticks!" chant the children, but few city-bred children know anything of the delight of really picking up sticks. I see the country boys and girls up in the hills gleaning the twigs that the Winter wind has flung down, and I am glad to watch the continuance of a custom that is as time-honored as

civilized or even barbaric man. The first children sent to gather faggots were the sons and daughters of the cave man who discovered fire.

Faggot gathering, like fishing or hiking, is an occupation that, quite aside from the healthy exercise, is conducive of a reflective mood. With the gleaning of the forest floor comes a philosophy of contentment and cheer. It goes well with the season of crisp weather and roaring fires. As you work you may find chinquapins or hickory nuts or hazelnuts, and slip a few in your pocket. Gay, little, crimson checkerberries, which you would pass by without seeing if you were merely out for a walk, look up at you as you bend down to pick up a branch, and if you love the tang of wild fruits you will stop and nibble at the wintergreen-flavored store. When you have worked in one spot long enough to allow Nature to forget its suspicion of man, rabbits and squirrels will frisk near you. Slowly, as you heap your arms with the jolly bundles of wood, quiet Nature opens her heart to you, full of content and cheer.

January 10.

News comes to-day of the death of William Safford in the sixty-sixth year of his life. With him, a man of no great fame outside his fields, in appearance Pickwick to the life, there yet passes away something that perhaps will not come again, the spirit of the old-fashioned naturalist. Alert, interested in anything under creation, a botanist, a zoölogist, an ethnologist, and a linguist, Safford was a true naturalist of the brotherhood of Darwin, Wallace, Lubbock, and White. Tirelessly observing, eagerly learning, actively publishing, an excited, discursive, astonishing talker, his was a warm and kindly beacon light. It is gone out now, and after the snuffing of Hudson's candle, I look in vain for another such.

Inevitably, perhaps, our age has tended toward excessive specialization. It is courageous nowadays to venture into more than one field of learning, for it invites the scorn of narrower intellects. At present the school

of mechanists, of test-tube experimenters, is in complete possession of the field of science, and the name of vitalist is a reproach. I am not sure what it is to be a vitalist, but as I translate the word I should interpret it to mean one who put his faith in Life. A vitalist, I should think, might admit that Life is explicable in terms of chemistry and physics; he would not concede that it was *reducible* to those terms.

There was nothing of the closet scientist about Safford. To him the living plant, the living man, the living culture were the absorbing things. With him observation was an art and a science, and he disproved the charge that is supposed to deprive the naturalist of a function, that all is known, explored, and charted.

January 14.

There is a sun-warmed slope in the woods that defies the Winter with unconquerable green. Overhead are the boughs of that lovely good-for-nothing, the Virginia pine,

and below the Christmas fern spreads gallantly a carpet.

With all my heart I like that valiant wood denizen—like it from its sturdy stem, with rugged brown scales at the base, to the fine-drawn tip of the fronds, where the spore dots cluster. Wonderful things, those spores—light as the wind, numerous as the hosts of Tartary, strong as seeds and even more fertile, they spread abroad, propelled by the swift uncoiling of springlike, tiny threads, to fall on lucky soil, I hope, and bring to birth more of the most welcome of ferns, *Polystichum*. May its tribe increase!

January 19.

Passing the crossroad where the gypsy camp has sprawled since early summer, I stopped short to see them piling their possessions in gaudy bundles into their anachronistic flivvers. There was no smoke from the shanties that have sheltered them; plainly they were breaking camp.

I asked a great, greasy woman with

broken teeth, and rings in her ears, where they were going and why.

She shrugged expressively.

"Dey buy de land. We get kicked out."

I don't like the sound of it; I don't want progressive farmers buying up these meadows and turning out such picturesque rubbish as the gypsies were.

There is little enough brilliance in this sad-colored Winter world, Lord knows. But one dear drop of blood color shines out these days through the draggled drab of January thaw—the cardinal. I could believe it is Spring, hearing him call. "Whee, you! Whee, you! Hurry, hurry, hurry, quick, quick, quick!" he shouts after me down the road, excited, urgent to be off on some happy enterprise.

Yet after all he is a stay-at-home. Many a bird with a voice less glorious and a dress less princely thinks itself too good for us and goes to spend the Winter with the notables at Palm Beach or at the watering places of Cuba. They may go; I shall not miss them while my friend the cardinal remains.

Nobody takes pot shots at him, for he is

not worth the eating. I am not so optimistic as to suppose that his beauty affords him any protection; the egret has found its loveliness to be its death. And so, year by year, his tribe increases. In fact, ornithologists observe that he is widening his natural range. A hundred years ago he was just becoming common as far north as Massachusetts; in the last decade he has been habituating himself to northern Wisconsin. Here he stands for all the seasons, and with each his call is varied. But never so much as now is his courageous, vaunting music welcome.

January 25.

Once among the millions of coals that I have shoveled into the maw of my furnace I found, upon the edge of one fragment, the faintest impress of the frond of a fern. A fossil it was, so casual and broken as to be of no value to science, but, as I held it in my hand and looked on that frail tracery of a plant that grew a score of millions of years ago and breathed the hot air of the Carbo-

niferous Age, I had a passing chill of excitement, very much as though I had found dinosaur tracks in my front yard.

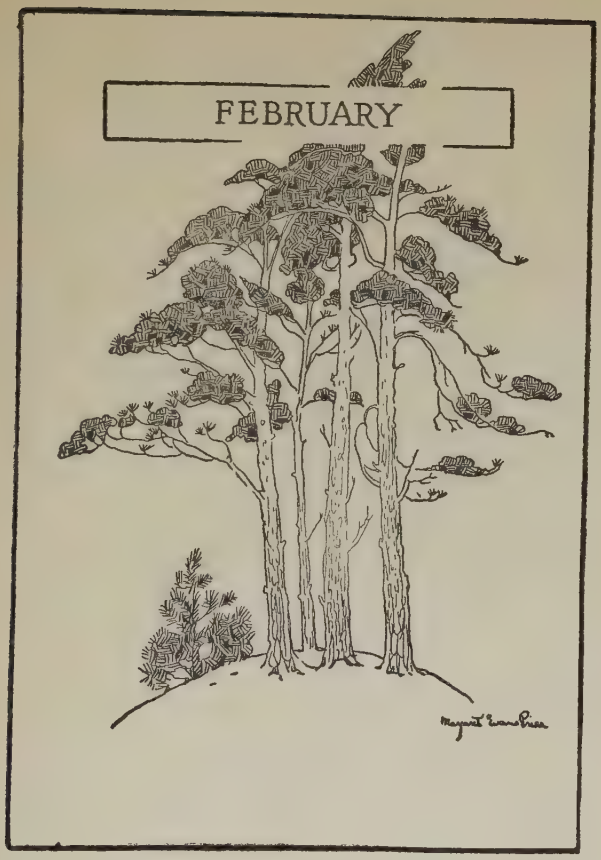
Since that day coal has never been merely coal to me, never just a costly black heap in the cellar to be converted into household heat, but my own private museum of plants of a staggering antiquity. True, I have not found any more fossils, but now, of a winter night, when I bank the fires and see the flame rise bluely, I marvel at my audacity in calmly turning into ashes the heritage of millions of years.

The glittering black chunks on my shovel were one time living trees, gigantic ferns and horsetails and club mosses taller than my house, raining their spores like pollen in a pine forest. They breathed that damp and steaming air; they looked down upon the armored monsters that sloshed along in ooze beneath them, and at last they fell, incredible giants, into the muck and pressure of the bogs.

Rameses? Why, that upstart lived in the last tick of the clock but one. Vandalistic peddling of Egyptian antiquities has been

stopped by the Government. And yet a miserable middleman, a smudge-faced, money-squeezing dealer, will monstrously dump a ton of fossilized Calamites or Lepidendron into a dark and dirty corner of my cellar. I am as shocked as that lady traveling in a railway carriage in Italy who heard the porter put his head through the window and bawl out in English, as brutally as though announcing Chicago,

"NEXT STATION POMPEII!"


FEBRUARY

February 7.

On my way up to see Father Tondorf, the wise old seismologist whose gentle mind is occupied with earth-shaking events, my eye was caught by a mass of green along the ancient retaining wall of the college. Wondering what it might be that made so brave a show in this drear month, I went close and examined the wall that carelessly I have passed so many times. There, with cunning seizing every foothold, slept the cliff brake, a fern so rare that I have never before succeeded in finding it hereabout.

The wall itself, where it slopes steeply down to the river, is crumbling. Thus it gives grudging harbor to the wilding, lovely with dark pinnate leaves and blackish purple stems, courageous with a tenacity that, through the years, has maintained foothold where it would seem the very rains must wash the slight thing from its perch. On

the new portions of the wall, where the masonry is firmer, the cliff brake is rare. How like this little aristocrat of the ferns to choose the worn, proud remnant of the wall!

It slept, I say—this fern—with its toes curled in against the cold, its fronds rolled up after the manner of the resurrection and lip ferns in dry weather. Some chancy wind of long ago must have blown the first spore hither, for it has spread along a hundred yards or so of wall, and that leafy penetration took patience and persistence and time.

For there are a thousand chances for failure to one of success when a discharged spore is sent out into the world to find fresh lodging. Only in a few untroubled spots have I elsewhere found it in this city—along the banks of the old canal which George Washington surveyed, where a ruinous wall still stands, and on the foundation stones of an old negro woman's cabin. I am told that the only other place where it grows hereabout is on some walls of Alexandria, where Washington used to go to church of a fine

Sunday when the roads from Mount Vernon were fair enough to let him travel so far.

February 8.

I am disturbed. Perhaps it is only because the wolves of worry growl so outside the doors of my mind that I put a dark interpretation on what may be a trifle.

I walked up to the MacGregors' after breakfast to get our daily ration of milk for the insatiable Bud, and found Mrs. MacGregor's quince face wrinkled in a mesh of indignation. It appeared, through her stream of angry story, that some one is trying to buy their place—has been trying since Fall and is now pushing insistence beyond the bounds of pleasantness.

"I'm a-goin' to get a dog," declared Mrs. MacGregor, "and set it on the next smooth-talkin' gentleman that comes tryin' to put God-fearin', hard-workin' souls out of house and home!"

Since Fall, she told me, they have been urged to sell. I shook my worried head on

the way home, remembering the man with the surveying instrument whom I met in the woods last September. Can this be the Ogre of Subdivision, with all its concomitant horrors of pavements and plumbing and progress, bringing its destructive fiery breath into the Hundred? Heaven forbid its menace reaching into the cool sanctuary of the ravine!

February 12.

To-day the nation is celebrating the birthday of Abraham Lincoln. It is quite forgotten that on the same day of the selfsame year, 1809, that brought to birth the Man of the People, there was born another great in understanding, Charles Robert Darwin.

I believe that Auguste Comte in his Religion of Humanity, which has, I fear, no disciples to-day, did propose a Darwin Day in his calendar of the saints of reason. And Chesterton characteristically remarks that Comte's holidays are about all that is worth salvaging from a coldly premeditated faith.

G. K., medieval that he is, possibly does not believe in evolution, but he says that he would be delighted to fire off firecrackers on Darwin Day. One presumes that he would value the pop-popping rather than Darwin himself.

The concussion of Darwin's ideas when they exploded on the Victorian world was so great that their reverberations are still traveling around the world, and, no doubt, among the spheres. For this reason there is a general belief that Darwin waged active warfare against old notions of Creation, against prejudice and orthodox faith. But like all naturalists, he was a gentle soul, ever scrupulous to avoid disturbing others with his theories and disbeliefs, even conspicuous in his parish for his charity to the church.

I cannot but admire a certain fine carelessness on Darwin's part towards his own great ideas. They came slowly and, though the first lines of his *Transmutation of Species* were penciled in his notebook in 1837, he did not trouble to communicate his beliefs to any but a few friends until he received Alfred Wallace's letter in 1858.

How different had been Wallace's intellectual experience! Lying ill with fever on the ancient spice island of Ternate in the Pacific, Wallace almost in a flash conceived the idea of the survival of the fittest. He wrote to his friend Darwin who saw in the letter his own ideas expounded and generously offered Wallace all the credit. This Wallace refused and then—and only then—did Darwin make known to the public his theory of evolution.

Having modestly stated his ideas, Darwin withdrew from the controversy, indifferent of its popular success. Wallace and Asa Gray were his champions, and the fiery Huxley who carried the battle almost to the steps of Canterbury Cathedral, where some centuries before another prophet had been slain for daring to defy constituted authority. Perhaps Darwin may be reproached for declining to give battle. But he was, though a mental giant, a physical cripple. For forty years he never enjoyed a day or night free from pain.

Perhaps, too, Darwin saw better than his zealous disciples how relative is Truth, how

little of herself she deigns to reveal to human understanding, and for this reason shrank from battling for his faiths as though they had been gospel. He took his doctrines to be what they were, theories, the best hypotheses he could invent to explain the baffling structure of Nature. His proselytes have too often claimed for his words the authority of revealed and absolute veracity. Moses did not assert much more.

And so this great mind, that loved the retirement of home in the country, the solace of music and backgammon and his pipe in the evenings, will go down the ages something of a riddle. We are left with the sketch of a very tall, old man, habitually stooped about the shoulders, agnostic, tolerant, charitable, inquisitive and kindly as a dog, with hands at times too weak to wield the pen but sure enough to perform the nicest experiments on the delicate mechanisms of orchids. It is no wonder that a man so unassuming has not commanded for his birthday any firecrackers or tinsel. Darwin leaves those honors to warriors and diplomats.

February 16.

The blow has fallen. Walking to-day with Narcissa through the mild amber glow of the late Winter sunshine, talking hopefully and happily of our dubious future, we turned the bend of the ravine where it slips into a cranny in the ridge, and stopped gasping before a huge board lettered in black—

Creevily's Cemetery Development
These 300 Beautiful Acres
Face the Future! Buy a Family Lot Now!

It was the grave that met us—of all our hopes, at least. We sat down on a lichened bowlder, and Narcissa—Narcissa the gallant and dauntless—cried her handkerchief wet, with her head on my shoulder.

"Creevily!" she sobbed bitterly. "It's creepy and evil, mixed! Oh, do you think," she cried suddenly, lifting flooded, brown eyes where hope was a star, "do you think the Acorn might be left out?"

I don't know, but I share her desperate hope. I shall go in and see the agent about it to-morrow. But after all, the valley, the Run, the Old Briary Place with its Maytime load of purple perfume, will all be turned to correct desolation.

February 17.

I saw the agent. And the Acorn, too, is doomed.

The cemetery people, as I told Narcissa over the little dinner table where even the lit candles couldn't lift the gloom, are even now arranging the purchase of the property with the representatives of the last of the Briarys, to whom our valley of happiness in cold fact belongs. The Last of the Briarys, I learned from the plethoric and indifferent agent, is an infant in arms, dwelling at present somewhere south of Nice, who is represented by trustees in the form of a bank in Seattle, Washington. It does not seem as though Narcissa's plan of flinging our case before the feet of the powers that be and

pleading mercy would be very feasible, even if it were likely to succeed.

February 19.

In the stately gloom of the imperial tombs of Chinese emperors at Jehol, it is pines that line the long avenues. The graves of great statesmen, mandarins, generals, and poets are planted variously with cedar, larch, hemlock, and balsam, according to rank. But the pine is reserved for The Sons of Heaven.

I like the choice; the emperors did themselves honor in electing the grandest of trees, for though there are bigger trees, who but a giant would make of a redwood a monument to himself? And Buddha, I believe, lays claim to the far-spreading banyan.

The pines are perhaps the most ancient of living trees, geologically considered. But what improvements has evolution made upon them? I see them now from my window, green and glorious among the stark hosts of the leafless. On my hearth the pine log crackles and spits sparkling rosin and throws

the glow of its warm heartwood into the room. The exquisite waves of the pine tree's growth are seen in the traceries and patterns of the woodwork. A heap of the cones is the plaything of the Bud.

I sit and watch him playing with them before the spitting fat pine fire, and write such trivial things as these in my journal, and try to keep my aching mind away from the bitter ending of our high adventure. For with the inexorable, cumulative effect of Greek drama, tragedy is piling upon tragedy.

I had clung, at least, to the hope that we might find some other wood-sheltered house when we had been put out of the Acorn, and begin anew to make a home and forget the love we had poured into this serene, unsuspecting valley. But with the perfect neatness of melodrama this morning's mail brought the ruin of that hope.

One letter informs me that the paper whose publication of my daily articles has meant roof and food for my little family is "changing to a management which does not subscribe wholly to present policy, and therefore regretfully discontinues" my column.

And the second brings the unsolicited information that there is a position as teacher of botany waiting for me in the Utterbach Boys' Seminary in Pittsburg.

Pittsburg! The spirit of smoke rising from the burning pinewood lifts nebulous hands in horror and vanishes up the chimney.

I have not told Narcissa. I shall have to tell her to-night, I suppose.

February 20.

Narcissa is a trump.

"Pittsburg," she said reflectively, after the whole ghastly tale had come out. "Do you know, I think smoke from factory chimneys can be perfectly beautiful, if you look at it that way."

I groaned, and went out to saw up for firewood the big tree that toppled ingloriously across the Run in that bitterest gale of last month.

Gunner turned up near dinner time, and Narcissa met him with hospitable gayety. I couldn't match that—I found myself telling

Gunner the whole tragedy, while Narcissa washed the dishes.

"Say, that's too bad!" he said wholeheartedly, his eyes round and protuberant and troubled. "Can't somethin' be done about it?"

I laughed, not gayly. "McCandless, the agent, told me the bank people in Seattle would sell it at the highest figure they could get, if I could raise something better than fifty thousand. That's what the cemetery people are bidding."

Gunner sighed heavily, and chewed his disreputable corncob.

"What'd you do with it if you got it, anyway?" he asked me.

And I told him. I told him the visionary plan I have loved to work out on long walks through the still woods and up on the windy ridges. How I would love to see the valley and the slopes and the little secret copses kept safe and remote forever, turned to a sanctuary for bird and beast and flower, however close the crowding city pushes. And instead there are to be grisly marble monuments like carved bathroom washbasins, and

iron picket fences, and no wilder or stranger flowers, I dare say, than red geraniums flagrantly mourning over the graves of the deceased!

February 26.

It was so mild a late winter dusk that the window stood open letting in the melody of the Run, swollen now with thaw, down in the valley bottom. We had not built a fire, nor yet lighted the candles, but sat, Narcissa and I, silent by the bare hearth.

"Anyway," I said at last, "we had this one shining year. We have it forever. The loveliest of our lives."

She nodded in the dim blue light.

"Isn't it splendid?" she said with a ring in her voice.

Then we heard heavy feet plodding up the path, and I rose with a sigh and opened the door to see Gunner coming up.

While Narcissa lighted the candles, we two lit up our pipes. There was a heavy silence over all three of us; no one felt like

making conversation. The little old clock on the mantel under the triumphant *Santa Maria* tick tocked hollowly on.

"Say," said Gunner, out of the unhappy pause, "I don't want you folks to move away."

"Thanks," I said drily, and could say no more.

"You mustn't move away," he urged, with more warmth than his wont. "I want you to stay right here."

His words lay a long time in the air.

Gunner began again, awkwardly. "You see," he said, "I've gone and bought this bit of property, and I kind of figured on you to help me out with it."

"You've bought the Acorn?" Narcissa cried.

He waved a vague, pudgy hand.

"All the valley," he said apologetically.

I don't think I heard what was said next, there was such a thunder of astonishment in my ears. Then I knew Gunner was saying,

"I didn't like the cemetery idea much, and I did kind of take a fancy to your notion of a reservation, or whatever you call it.

Kind of thought I'd fix it up and give it my name—which isn't Gunner, by the way. I'd like *somethin'* named after me, since I haven't got kids."

"You—you bought it?" was all I could get out.

He nodded, that heavy, stupid drop of the head that is so much his characteristic.

"Yep, I bought it. I haven't had much to do, last few years—my steel mills kinda take care of 'emselves by now. And I been gettin' outdoors for the first time in my life. Always wanted to and didn't have the time, I was so busy gettin' money I don't want now I got it. Only thing I thought of doing, at first, was shootin'. And you kinda spoiled me for that. You showed me a lot that's a damn sight better."

Narcissa was crying softly.

"So I kinda thought," Gunner said, with an unhappy glance at her, "that you'd maybe be willing to stay on here and sort of supervise this reservation stunt—be a warden, sort of. At—oh, four-five thousand a year. Would you? 'Twouldn't take too much of your time."

It is nearly dawn—a strange, mystical white hour, with a touch of awe upon it. Narcissa is asleep upstairs. But I could sleep no more. I got up, too full of happiness for inaction, and came down here in the chill, strangely empty living room to write down this miracle in my journal, by the light of a candle, and wait till it is time to go out and salute the sun as it tops the eastern ridge.

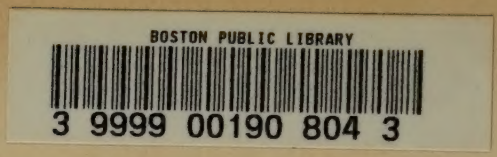
February 28.

The ice has not yet left the ground, nor the snow melted in its last desolate stronghold on the north side of the house. Yet, impatient for Spring, I took my spade and turned a clod of soil, breaking the glebe up with the flat of the blade and spreading it thin on the grass. Out of the mass some white grubs stirred; numb beetles on their backs stretched stiff legs, and a chill earthworm squirmed his coral length. The split half of a crocus bulb lay there too, slipping out of its old brown coat and showing clear,

young white beneath, with just a tip of sprouting green. And so I know, though wintry days may yet be in store, that Spring is on the way.

(1)

THE END



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